Lieutenant Barnabas

FRANK BARRETT

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS.

A NOVEL.

BY

FRANK BARRETT.

AUTHOR OF "FOLLY MORRISON," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,
NEW BURLINGTON STREET.
1881.

Right of Translation Reserved.

CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Night of the Ball	1
II.	A Second Offer	13
III.	An Evil Genius	26
IV.	Before the Fight	43
V.	Dr. Blandly's Opposition	66
VI.	The Fight	75
VII.	After the Fight	85
VIII.	At the "Lone Crow"	100
IX.	In the Loft	115
X.	Blarney	123
XI.	Revelation	137
XII.	A Retrospect	148
XIII.	Premeditation	176
XIV.	Rousing the Lion	190
XV.	Sweethearts	199
XVI.	Escape	218
XVII.	An Afternoon's Work	226
XVIII.	Blake and Tom's Conclusions	243
XIX.	A Love Letter	257
XX.	Barnabas Prepares for Business	276
XXI.	The Business is Done	292

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025

https://archive.org/details/lieutenantbarnab00barr_1

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS.

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT OF THE BALL.

LADY BETTY was dressed and waiting in her mamma's bedroom, while that lady vainly endeavoured to get her foot into a shoe several sizes smaller than her foot.

"I know I told him to make them small, but I didn't tell him to make them too small," said Mrs. St. Cyr, pettishly;

"I can't go without shoes, that's certain, and I have no others. I have got my toes in, that's one comfort, though the pain is most excruciating. A knock at the door? Come in. No, wait! Who's there?"

"I," answered Tom, from the outside. "Gerard waits, and the carriage is at the door."

"Tell him I shall not keep him a moment. I have only to get on my shoes, and one is nearly half on already. I shan't be ten minutes. My darling, I can never get them on." To the heated maid, "Pull, you stupid thing, pull!"

Presently, Lady Betty unable to assist, and her stock of advice exhausted, left the room to descend to the drawing-room.

Tom was sitting on the stairs.

"Are you ready?" he asked, slipping one hand behind him.

"Quite. You have the first view: what do you think of me?"

"You are beautiful!" he answered in a murmur. "But the light is insufficient here; will you come down to the dining-room."

"Why not the drawing-room?"

"Gerard is there." She looked at him, laughed low, and laying her hand on his arm, said:

"We must go past the door silently, or he will be jealous, too."

They stole past the drawing-room door, Lady Betty with her red nether lips under her pearly teeth, and an expression of innocent wickedness in her lively eyes.

"*Now*, what do you think of me?" she asked again, as they came into the light of the dining-room, and closed the door.

"You, or your dress?" asked Tom.

"Both—individually and separately."

"There are no words rich enough to express what I think of your beauty; but your costume seems to me imperfect. Something should crown the perfect brow."

"Ah!" said Lady Betty, with a sigh. "I thought of a tiara—but mamma pleaded poverty. I did think of the light with which Aurora's head is represented."

"So did I," said Tom, bringing his hand from behind him, and putting a large case in Lady Betty's hands.

She opened it, looked at it in breathless surprise and delight for a minute, then lifted her eyes to Tom's face, and the next moment—laid the box on the table and burst into tears.

"What *is* the matter, dear girl?" asked Tom, in terror.

She did not reply. A girl does not

make fine speeches when her heart is full, and sobs rise choking in her throat.

"Dear Betty—what moves you so?" he asked, again.

"Your heart," sob "is too—too good," sob, "dear Tom, and I—I am a"—sob "selfish girl—I know I am" sob—"and I think only of my own happiness, and forget my dear"—sob "dear—dearest friend."

She came close to him, suffering him to put his arm around her and wipe the tears from her eyes with his handkerchief, as he said soothingly:

"Come, Betty dear, smile. I bought the toy to please you, not to make you cry."

"I wish with all my heart you were going with me, Tom," she said, still looking grave.

He looked down upon her sweet face, then bent and pressed a kiss upon her

waving hair. It was the passionate kiss of a lover, but it imparted no more emotion to her than a mother's caress. Another moment's regretful silence, and then her eyes wandered to the table where she had deposited the gift, and she smiled again. It was yet April with her.

He released her, and she took the diadem—set it on her head, and looking at herself in the glass, gave a deep sigh of satisfaction.

"'Tis charming," she said. "I must go and show it to mamma at once."

"Can't you wait here till she comes down?"

"It is getting so late, Tom—and mamma must be hurried. Poor soul, she has to put on a pair of shoes, and the two are only large enough for one foot. Ah! there is her voice—she has done it!"

"Mr. Talbot," called Mrs. St. Cyr. "Will you be good enough to bid the coachman lay down the carpet and open the door of the chariot?"

And while Lady Betty ran up to the drawing-room to display herself before Mrs. St. Cyr and Gerard, Tom did his duty, and saw that the necessary arrangements were made; afterwards he had the happiness of taking Lady Betty down, and placing her in the carriage, Mrs. St. Cyr following slowly, supported by Gerard and the maid.

It required the combined efforts of Tom and Gerard to hoist Mrs. St. Cyr into her seat, for her shoes seemed to have deprived her limbs as well as her feet of power.

Tom closed the door, gave a last glance at Lady Betty's radiant face—and then signalled to the coachman, and saw the heavy chariot roll away.

"Shall I leave the door open for you, Sir?" asked the maid, when she had waited a reasonable time after the departure of the carriage, for Tom to make some movement.

Aroused from the lethargy into which he had sunk when the chariot disappeared from his sight, Tom shook his head without turning, and slowly walked away. He had nowhere to go, nothing to do, the customary resources of entertainment were unpalatable to him, and so he wandered about purposelessly, until it suddenly struck him that it would be agreeable to walk in Stanhope Street, and look at the house where Lady Betty was enjoying herself.

Thoroughfare was stopped in the approaches to Mrs. Walker's house. Carriages blocked the streets, and the masks made their way on foot escorted by liveried servants with flambeaux. In

front of the house a company of musicians in costume received the visitors, a detachment of the Royal Guards kept back the mob. Tom threw himself into the crowd, and partly by the exertions of those around him, partly by his own, got a place in the front rank, nearly facing the house.

There was very little to see. The masks entering the house were the attraction for most people; but Tom fixed his eyes on the windows of the ball-room, and saw nothing else in trying to define the outline of one beloved figure in the moving throng shadowed upon the rose silk blinds. He had no doubt that Lady Betty was the centre of admiration, and a feeling of pride stirred his heart, as he thought, erroneously enough perhaps, that all the commotion about him was but a tribute to her beauty.

Suddenly the Body Guards began to back their horses, the hum of voices rose to a roar, and the royal carriage drove up to the door. The Prince of Wales in a grey silk domino with a deep lace edged cape, and Mrs. FitzHerbert, in a pale lilac silk domino alighted, and entered the house. Tom then ceased to exult in the beauty of Lady Betty.

The mob thinned quickly after the departure of the royal carriage. In half-an-hour visitors ceased to arrive, in an hour the idlers had gone to their homes. Probably no one would leave the ball for three hours at the least. Yet Tom still paced the pavement, his head down and his hands behind him. Time was nothing to him.

The gaiety in the ball-room was in its zenith. Passing the house strains of music reached his ears. The sound

displeased him; he could not look up at the rose-pink blinds; he feared shadows now, and his mind was again tormented with turbulent jealousy. He turned up Stanhope Street to escape the sounds of music. At the upper end all was still, the coachmen slept inside their carriages, and there was not a sound, except when a horse pawed the ground or champed its bit. Suddenly the silence was rudely broken by hurrying footsteps, and voices raised high.

"Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot! Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot!" was the cry.

Tom stopped in amazement, and turned to see who called.

A man in a white satin costume, without his hat, ran past him, looking at the carriages and calling as he went, "Mrs. St. Cyr's carriage!" It was Gerard Crewe.

Tom recognised him, and running after him, caught hold of his arm.

"What is the matter? where is Lady Betty?" he cried.

"She is quite safe," answered Gerard, without stopping, and still glancing from carriage to carriage, while three or four men still woke the echoes with their cry for Mrs. St. Cyr's chariot.

"Then why have you left her? answer me, Gerard. You promised to protect her. Have you left her with her mother?"

"Her mother," answered Gerard, "is dead!"

CHAPTER II.

A SECOND OFFER.

MRS. ST. CYR had taken a seat in a corner of the ball-room, which commanded a good view, and had not moved from it. She was pale, and complained of "the palpitations," but Lady Betty, who knew nothing of Doctor Blandly's warning, had treated these signs and words lightly, and attributed them to nothing more serious than to the torture of wearing tight shoes.

Mrs. St. Cyr's excitement was followed

by a strange drowsiness. A dowager who sat next to her observed that she dropped her fan without noticing it, and her head sank forward slightly as if she were dozing. At that moment she thought it right to awake her, as Lady Betty was approaching with the Prince.

"Rise, madam, rise," she said; "the Prince of Wales and your daughter are before you."

Mrs. St. Cyr opened her eyes, to see, perhaps, the consummation of her dream, rose with a faint cry, and then fell forward, dead, at the very feet of her daughter and the Prince. The subsequent inquiry proved that her heart was diseased, and its action had been so weak, that the excitement of the scene was amply sufficient to produce death.

It was the most severe shock Lady Betty had ever had. For some days her

faculties seemed numbed and paralysed by the terrible catastrophe; she received the condolence of visiting friends with slight emotion, almost with apathy, as if she could not yet realise that the event was actual and real; then her spirit awoke from its lethargy, to suffer all that a womanly heart can endure in its first experience of loss. For a week she was disconsolate, refusing to see anyone except her maid and Tom.

In the hour of grief Tom had a manly incapability of saying anything, which made him a more acceptable companion to the sufferer than any wordy comforter. Beyond bringing her presents of flowers and fruit he offered no consolation, he was too wretched himself, but she knew that he sympathised with her to his soul's extent, his face was constantly long, his complexion bad, and more than once when she burst into tears he kept her

company; for be it remembered men at that time were either softer of heart or less ashamed of tears than now.

After Mrs. St. Cyr's funeral Lady Betty's grief diminished, she assuaged her tears, and began to look about her. One fine afternoon she consented to walk in the park with Tom. It surprised her to find all the trees in young leaf, and delighted her also. They walked in the alleys removed from the promenade, and to Lady Betty's mind there was nothing more beautiful than the look of the tender green foliage, the bright soft light, and the occasional glimpse of gaiety in the distant promenade. The retirement harmonized with the lingering sadness in her heart, while the occasional snatches of colour and life upon the promenade suggested hope and pleasure.

"Let us sit here," she said, when they came to a seat.

They sat in the soft umbrage, and Lady Betty, looking around her, said :

"Ah ! if poor dear mamma was beside us !"

Tom responded only with a sigh, sighing not because of Mrs. St. Cyr's absence—he had an idea that Mrs. St. Cyr would not have chosen that pleasant retreat to rest in—but in sympathy with Lady Betty. Her face was pale and sad, she looked sweeter than ever in her mourning dress.

Neither spoke for some time ; a sparrow struggling to carry away a long straw to its nesting-place presently attracted their attention. Lady Betty became interested in the efforts of the sturdy little creature, and her face grew animated.

"Pretty dear !" she murmured.

"Would you not like to go in the

country?" asked Tom; "to hunt in the woods for primroses and anemonies? 'Tis not too late."

"Oh, there's nothing I like better than hunting in the woods for wild flowers! Daffodils—don't you like daffodils, with their great, bold yellow blooms and tender green leaves? Oh, yes, I should like to go in the country!" She clasped her hands with delight, then with a return of gravity. "But how can I go now, Tom, alone?"

"You are not alone," said Tom, gently resting his arm on his knee, and looking into her face.

She looked at him gravely, dropped her eyes, and twined her fingers in silence.

"Be my wife, dear, and let us go away where nature is sweetest," continued Tom. "By the time the wild roses are in bloom your cheeks will be pink again, and your heart light."

She lifted her eyes and looked straight before her, her mind gradually wandering from the subject of Tom's remarks. The thick trunk of a tree stopped her view; moving a little from Tom and inclining her head to the side, she just caught a glimpse of the promenade—of carriages moving rapidly, of ladies gaily dressed, and dawdling dandies. Then a lady on horseback passed, and she craned her neck a little farther to see if she sat well, if her figure was good, and her habit becoming. Perhaps it was that glimpse that decided her fate.

"Be it yes or nay, give me an answer," pleaded Tom.

"No, Tom—I cannot marry yet," she answered, looking him full in his earnest face. "When I am sad I feel as if I would like to be a sober wife, and think of no one but you, and settle

down to the steady routine of a domestic life. But I don't want you to have a sad, dull wife, and I don't want to marry for a mean motive—a selfish end. I must give my husband love for love, or we shall be mated but not matched. Give me time, Tom. I do believe I shall marry you one day, for I can imagine no one so loving and true as you."

"Will you not give me your pledge that you will marry me and no one else."

"No—that would never do," she smiled. "I can do nothing under restraint. It is the fault of my nature. If I had been in Eve's place, I should have made myself ill with eating apples, without waiting for any serpent to advise me. Wait patiently a little while. Fruit is best gathered when ripe."

"But you cannot live alone in that house."

Lady Betty thought of the lonely house, and shuddered slightly.

"Everyone admits that," pursued Tom. "It will expose you to observation if I visit you more frequently than custom allows to ordinary friendship."

"That is not your idea, Tom. Who told you so?"

"Gerard." Tom hesitated a moment or two, then continued. "He has argued the matter clearly, and convinced me against my own opinion." He paused, then with an evident struggle recommenced. "I'll tell you all. The fact is, while you have refused to see your friends they have been thinking a great deal about you, and failing to see you themselves, have sent a message through me."

"How mysterious you are — why did you not deliver your message before?"

"You will see presently. Mrs. Walker"—Tom groaned—"Mrs. Walker desires you to live with her while she remains in London."

"How kind," said Lady Betty, her eyes sparkling.

"And Gerard has pointed out that it will be the best thing in the world for you, if—if you won't marry me. You know now why I delayed giving her message."

"You are a selfish, cruel — dear. Be cheerful, Tom. Don't you see that the prospect makes me happy. Why are you crushing that herb under your heel, and looking as though you wished that spot of ground comprised all London."

"Because I hate London," said he

with emphasis, grinding a hole and burying the unoffending herb with his heel.

"That is to say you hate Mrs. Walker."

"There is no love lost between us. We have spoken to each other only once, and parted with a mutual desire to see each other no more."

"If she was rude to you, Tom, she was rude to me, and I will speak to her no more."

"No. I think it was the other way. I was rude to her. I believe 'tis nothing but mutual antipathy. Do not let my ill-temper prejudice you against her—it is my belief that her intentions towards you are of the kindest—and—and I believe you will be happy if you accept the invitation."

"Tell me why the proposal is unpleasant then to you?"

"Consider what I lose! I may see you by chance now and then in the Park—at the theatre—in a picture-gallery—you may pass me in her carriage, or on horse; but virtually you are lost to me—for a season at least. Yet that may be no more than the beginning of a still wider and more complete separation."

"Oh, Tom, how can you say so—sitting here by my side, knowing me as you do. Am I heartless and false utterly. Did I say that I loved you better than anyone in the world that my words should be forgotten or mistrusted? if so I wish the admission unsaid."

"Forgive me for saying anything which could make you imagine me so ungrateful. What I meant is this: I cannot visit you at Mrs. Walker's."

"And why not? Listen, Tom—if I

may not see my friends as freely as I wish—if you are not to be as welcome as myself, I will not accept this invitation."

Lady Betty meant what she said. Nevertheless at the end of six weeks she had been a resident in Mrs. Walker's house for a month, and had seen Tom three times and no more.

CHAPTER III.

AN EVIL GENIUS.

"DEAR TOM,

"Have you forgotten me so soon? I have not seen you for three weeks; it is not my fault. Come and beg my forgiveness. To-morrow afternoon I shall be quite alone, and, I think, gently disposed.

"Very affectionately yours,

"LADY BETTY."

To this point Tom read with a flow of happiness to his heart, which was

sadly in need of such a tender influence. He put the letter to his lips, for her hand had touched and hallowed it. Then he read the foot note:

"Postscriptum—Don't come to-day."

Tom folded the letter in sombre meditation.

"Why are you not to go to-day?" asked his evil genius.

And the evil genius having obtained great power over Tom in the past unhappy fourteen or fifteen days, he lent ear, and against all the better promptings of his mind, he determined that he would call upon Lady Betty this very afternoon. If Lady Betty was out no harm could be done; if, on the other hand, Lady Betty had visitors to whom she gave the preference, harm might be done, "and so much the better," hinted the evil genius.

He allowed no time for his blood to

cool; in hot haste he made his way to Stanhope Street. As he approached the house at the corner, the Prince of Wales's carriage passed him, empty. He stopped and looked after it, trembling in every limb with the fever of jealousy. Poor fool! if the Prince had been seated peaceably in the carriage he would have felt no less emotion.

The footman, in reply to his question, answered that Miss St. Cyr was in the house, and conducted him into the library, where he found himself alone. The reflection flashed upon him that perhaps after all he had deceived himself. It was not impossible that Mrs. Walker was unwell and wished to be alone. He sat down wondering how he should excuse himself when Lady Betty came to him if this were the case. He listened to an approaching footstep with agitation.

The door opened, and there entered—Gerard Crewe.

"Ah, Tom," he said, closing the door.

The catch seemed difficult to fasten. He stood still with his hand on the lock.

"You have come at an unfortunate moment. Sit down," he said, crossing the room.

"One word. Is Lady Betty upstairs?"

"Yes; she is in the reception-room," answered Gerard, standing between Tom and the door.

"Then I will go up to her."

Tom tried to pass, but Gerard, quickly shifting his position, faced him still, and said:

"Sit down, my dear Tom; be reasonable. It is impossible for you to go upstairs at present."

"And why?" asked Tom, in a harsh voice.

"The Prince is there."

"I knew it—I knew it," muttered Tom, his face growing livid, and his teeth clenched tightly together. "I knew it the moment you entered the room. We shall see if it is impossible to go into the reception-room."

He pushed brusquely past Gerard, and attempted to open the door. It was locked and the key taken.

"Who has locked this door?" he cried, fiercely.

"I have. The key is in my pocket. You shall have it the moment you are calm."

"What authority have you to put conditions upon my liberty?"

"The authority of a friend."

"I refuse to consider you my friend. Give me the key."

"Not until you are reasonable, and know what you are doing."

"You villian! give me the key!" Tom cried in a fury, seizing Gerard by the arm.

Gerard was far the slighter man. In a struggle he would have had no chance against Tom; but he did not budge an inch. He looked in Tom's face with unflinching calmness, and said:

"Take your hand from my arm, Tom. What do you expect to gain by this violence? I will fling the key through the window rather than suffer you to disgrace yourself and insult Lady Betty. I am her friend no less than you; at this moment I am a better friend than you."

"You, a ——"

Tom checked himself. Mad as he was with passion he was ashamed of the taunt at his tongue's end.

"A gamester by my own confession," said Gerard, completing Tom's sentence. "Well?"

Tom dropped his hand from Gerard's arm abashed. Gerard took advantage of the momentary calm and continued:

"A gamester may yet have the feelings of a man—pity for another, blind and reckless with jealousy, and for a helpless, sensitive girl. Listen to me, Tom."

There was the sound of a door opening in the room above, and of voices, which, falling on Tom's ear, re-aroused the devil in his breast.

"I will not listen to you," he cried. "It is by listening to your sophistry that I have been cheated into error—that I suffered Lady Betty to come into this—this den ——"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I say that this house is vile, and you know it. Who is this Mrs. Walker —this fashionable beauty? A second Mrs. FitzHerbert. And between you you would make a third of Lady Betty. You play the part of jackal to a marvel, guarding the royal beast with the hope of getting what is left when his appetite is glutted. Send me your friends to-morrow, you shall not live if there is justice in Heaven!"

Tom threw himself in a chair, as if exhausted by the paroxysm of his rage. The street door had closed. Gerard made no answer to Tom except by a formal bow. He walked across and across the room, with his eyes on the floor.

There was a knock at the door, and Lady Betty, in a lively tone, cried, "May I come in, gentlemen?"

Gerard glanced at Tom, who sat sul-

lenly in his chair and heard the voice without moving a muscle, and then took the key from his pocket and opened the door.

Lady Betty entered with a bright smile on her face, caught sight of Tom, checked herself in the very act of making a courtesy, and becoming instantly serious, said to Gerard:

"Mrs. Walker is alone; will you be good enough to join her?"

After a moment's hesitation, Gerard bowed and left the room. Tom still sat.

"Do you know that I am in the room?" Lady Betty asked.

Tom rose to his feet, and said coldly:

"You did not expect to see me, it seems."

"No; I wrote asking you not to come this afternoon. Evidently you did not receive my letter."

"On the contrary; it was that request which brought me here."

"In that case you owe me an explanation."

"It is very simple. I suspected your reason for wishing me away."

"You are so amazingly candid that I should not be surprised by your adding that the main object of your visit is to insult me."

"There are insults, less pardonable than the plain speaking of an honest man, which you appear to accept with willingness."

"If you think I feel any sort of pleasure in submitting to yours, you are in error."

"I am in no humour to bandy words, Lady Betty, the subject is too serious to treat with drawing-room levity. You know the insults to which I refer."

"In the matter of insults you must

necessarily have the advantage of me. At present I have experience of only one kind of insolence, but doubtless, with Mr. Talbot to enlighten me, I shall soon know every possible variety."

"I would that you knew no worse than I can offer—the rudeness of a rough and angry man." Tom spoke with a soft inflexion of the voice, and his eyes rested for a moment on Lady Betty with a tenderness which did more to shake her than his fiercest words. "The insult which should make your virgin blood rise in choler to your face, and stir your soul with indignation, is that which men, wanting in principle and honour, put upon you when they claim equality with you."

"I do not understand you," said Lady Betty, with grave perplexity in her voice and features.

"My meaning is this—the men who visit this house, to whom you give your hand in friendship, whose conversation you listen to are *roués*—rakes—men loose in thought and principle, who wouldn't hesitate to take advantage of your innocence, seeking by insidious means to shake the foundation of your self-respect and delicacy."

"Tom, I should laugh if anyone but you talked such extravagant nonsense; but I feel more inclined to cry when you suffer your reason to be so warped by prejudice and jealousy. Is it possible that a society can be formed entirely of perfect men and women. Is each individual to be examined and to carry a diploma of merit for presentation on his introduction to a new acquaintance. And do not you think that if an examination of that kind could be made, the society founded upon it would be very hypo-

critical, very narrow, and excessively stupid?"

"While men conceal their vices they have yet a sufficient decency to claim our respect; but others, whose vices are flagrant, whose immorality is public ——"

"Whom do you refer to?"

"The man whose society you prefer to mine—the man you were closetted with, while your friend Gerard, held me a prisoner here."

Lady Betty's cheeks flushed red, and she cried—"Have you no shame, Tom? I was closetted with no one. The Prince was Mr. Walker's visitor, not mine. It is a struggle to think gently of you when you wrong me by suspicion, and hard to bear in mind that you have been good to me when you treat me so ill. It was love for you that made me ask you to see me when we should be alone and free

from the interruption of visitors—it was consideration for you that made me add the postscript; but love and consideration are powerless against your morbid jealousy. I sacrifice my pride in adopting this explanatory tone, for with all my faults, I am not ungrateful nor forgetful."

"If you knew the danger in which you stand, you would forgive me for my savage eagerness to save you—even if I had no other claim upon your tenderness."

"I do know the danger in which I stand—the peril that menaces every attractive woman, and I tell you this—knowledge is a better arm to virtue than ignorance."

Tom did not respond. The fact that he had been shamefully unjust to Lady Betty, and made a fool of himself began to dawn upon his mind.

"To think you should misdoubt me so!" said Lady Betty, then her courage giving way, she sought her pocket-handkerchief, sobbing—"I—I believe you would shut me up in a convent if you could."

"No, not that—I would shield you from harm, not with cold walls, but with these two loving arms, dear girl. Give me by a word the right to be your champion and defender."

"No, Tom, no." Lady Betty said with resolution, as she wiped her eyes and put her handkerchief away. "No. I will not marry until I feel quite certain that my husband and I shall make each other happy. And just at this moment"—she added with a gleam of her habitual humour—"the prospect is not very promising."

"You are right," said Tom. Then he held out his hand and she gave him hers,

and they stood looking into each other's eyes sadly for some seconds.

Their thoughts were not in the same train, yet the thought of each was pregnant with regret.

Lady Betty had expected their meeting and their parting to be so different. For instead of thinking harm of her lover, she had put a favourable construction upon his absence, and half determined that when they met she would let him see just how much she loved him; and if in consequence, he should repeat the offer of marriage, she thought she might say yes. She had surveyed mankind during her residence with Mrs. Walker, and found no specimen at all comparable with Tom. Now, this little scheme must be abandoned—and the chance of making him happy or of being happy herself for a long time to come, seemed slight indeed.

Tom did not know the cost of his jealousy, or how much he had lost by his inopportune visit; what concerned him was poor Lady Betty's grief, and he said to himself, that it was shameful to treat a sweet, unoffending girl with groundless imputations, and cruel doubts, and that he would take himself right away from her until he could think of her justly and well. He would not go out of the country—that would be too hard—but to Talbot Hall—supposing he came off luckily from his forthcoming encounter with Gerard Crewe.

Then they parted, and were utterly wretched—both.

CHAPTER IV.

BEFORE THE FIGHT.

DOCTOR BLANDLY, sat on a firm, wooden stool, conveniently placed among the alders, beside the admirable preserves adjoining the old Ferry House Inn, Tottenham. His right hand grasped a rod; he raised his left hand gently and pressed his spectacles a little closer to his nose; his lips were tightly closed; his eyes were fixed upon the float; he scarcely breathed. His left hand slowly descended to his knee, and

he gradually rose from his seat; then as the quill dipped once more he gave the line a snatch and felt his victim jerking and pulling at the hook.

"Ha ha, my boy. I have you this time," said he, raising the fish carefully to the grass.

"And you deserve him; you haven't relaxed a muscle these last ten minutes."

Doctor Blandly turned to see who spoke, and found Tom Talbot at his back.

"You, Tom!" he cried, wringing the young man's hand, and holding it in the affectionate manner of a sincere old friend. "I thought you were off on your travels again, my boy."

"Here I am, Sir, with as little chance of leaving England as that poor devil of a fish."

He spoke with unusual gravity, and fixed his eyes on the fish that was gasping feebly in the grass. Doctor Blandly

scanned his face attentively, and laying down his rod, said to himself—"There's more than common meaning in those words, or my name is not Blandly;" then as he raised himself he said in a low tone of anxiety:

"What's the matter, Tom?"

"A matter, Doctor, in which I require your assistance, you may be sure, by the fact that I come to break in upon your sport."

"We will go into the house."

"There is no hurry for an hour or two. Throw out your line, and I will sit on the grass here by your side, and tell all that you have to know."

"If you think fish are to be caught while one is talking to the angler, you do an injustice to the fish; and if you think I can enjoy sport and listen to your trouble at the same time, you do an injustice to me. Jerry!"

In answer to this call there came a low muttering from the further side of a thorn bush.

"Jerry!" repeated Doctor Blandly, impatiently. "D—— that fellow! when he gets a rod in his hand he loses all sense of duty. Jerry!"

At the third call Jerry backed into sight, holding his rod at arm's-length, and straining his eyes towards his float.

"Another moment and I should have caught him!" he murmured, in a tone of deep regret, as, unable to protract his occupation to a greater length, he raised his hook.

"What, had you a nibble?" asked the Doctor, with something like sympathy in his voice.

"Not a quarter of an hour ago," replied Jerry. "Morning, Master Tom," he added, touching his hat.

"Where's Baxter?" asked Doctor Blandly.

"*I* don't know, Sir. He's been running up and down the bank for the last half-hour like a dog that won't take to the water."

"Jerry! Jerry!"

"Ask your pardon, Doctor, but that there Mr. Baxter he *is* such a fisherman. First he gets his hook in the weeds, then he thinks he's got a bite, and jerks his float, and his hook, and his bait, and every blessed thing into the top branches of an alder, then he breaks his line, gets another, slips in the water and frightens the fish, and afterwards complains that he never has a bite!"

Doctor Blandly chuckled.

"Well, well," said he; "fish out one of the bottles from the water and take it to him, Jerry. I'll wager he will sit still for half-an-hour with that beside

him. What can you expect?" he asked, turning away and taking Tom's arm, "What *can* you expect of a man who allowed himself to be caught by Mrs. Baxter? Look around you, Tom, my boy; the tender green of these water meadows spangled here and there with patches of yellow celandine, over there all golden with buttercups, the hedges pink with dog-roses that give the air a wholesome sweet flavour, the chesnuts by the road, the pollard-willows bending over the shining water, the pearly clouds floating lazily before the wind, the red-brick inn where we shall find a snowy cloth spread with a great round cheese, a brown crusty loaf, and a jug of sparkling ale all waiting to refresh us when we enter. Here Nature smiles and says, 'Behold the very best I have to give, enjoy it and be happy.' To the rational being, with a sound jacket to his

back and eighteen pence in his pocket, there is, indeed, nothing left to desire. He takes and is thankful. But your wayward egotist, of which Baxter is the type, answers, 'ʼTis not enough,' and forthwith takes a wife, then, i' faith, he finds to his sorrow that he has too much, and knows the ineffable blessing of contentment no more."

Tom made no answer. Earth and all that it held, and more than that, he valued less than Lady Betty. He looked round upon the meadows, and saw them only mechanically; for the first time in his life the beauty of nature did not touch his heart. Nothing there could give him happiness, and he was famishing for want of it.

"She is not here," he said to himself, "and I—I cannot 'clog the hungry edge of appetite by bare imagination of a feast.'"

They entered the "Ferry-boat," where Doctor Blandly's expectations were realised. In the sanded parlour a cloth was spread, and the untouched half of a ripe Cheshire cheese stood in the centre, flanked by a couple of loaves.

"I've kept it for you, Doctor," said the host, pointing to the cheese with pride. "Kept it untouched for a fortnight. Smell of it, Sir; look at it, see the veins of it, Sir!"

"Blue as a bilberry!" responded the Doctor, with satisfaction. "And now for the ale, Mr. Grigs." When the ale was put upon the table and Mr. Grigs had withdrawn, Doctor Blandly said, "Now, Tom, for your news."

"We will have our bread and cheese first, Doctor."

"Right, my boy, help yourself. What ale! Yes, you can save the serious busi-

ness until we have satisfied our appetites. Did you ever see a handsomer loaf than that now, Tom? Still, we can talk of trifles."

"Yes, yes, trifles," answered Tom, absently, munching his crust and looking blankly through the opposite window.

Doctor Blandly shot a keen glance at the young man, which assured him that he was in no humour for talking on trifles.

"I wrote to you best part of a month ago, young man, and getting no answer I naturally supposed that you had run away again."

"You wrote to me, Doctor?"

"Yes, saying I wished to see you on a rather important matter of business."

"True, I remember the letter; I should apologise, but that my mind has been burdened, burdened!"

"With business of a *very* important

kind. Ha! ha! A little more ale, Tom. The fact is, I made a very lucky speculation on your account."

"Have you indeed."

Tom cut a crust, and that and the fortunate speculation seemed to be of equal interest.

"You can add close upon twenty thousand pounds to your capital if you choose to take legal advantage of your position."

"Oh, that's understood; set the lawyers to work and pile up my treasures."

"I should point this out as another instance of the natural consequence of folly and restless greed, but that the sinner is dead, and the punishment falls upon the guiltless."

"Indeed! Pass the mustard, Doctor."

"You remember the poor woman, doubtless—Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Mrs. St. Cyr! ah!" Tom laid down his knife, and his whole attention became rivetted upon Doctor Blandly. "What of her?"

"She had twenty thousand pounds with which she wished to speculate. Her idea was this, she might purchase an annuity terminable with her life, which would enable her to live in a style consistent with her extravagant tastes, but not with her means."

"An annuity terminable with her life; but what provision did that make for her daughter?"

"None—absolutely none. It left her penniless."

"Incredible!"

"Not if you know the woman. I told her she could not live; she, confident in herself alone, believed otherwise. She fancied that by a lavish expenditure she should deceive the world with respect to

her daughter's heritage; she believed that her daughter would entrap a rich man in marriage; and she believed she would live to see her daughter thus provided for; she was wrong."

"Wrong—wickedly wrong. Did you not dissuade her?"

"I tried to dissuade her, and failed."

"Then Lady Betty—Miss St. Cyr has nothing."

"Not a rap. She has no right to another farthing of her mother's money."

"Who has the money?"

"You, Tom. It is the addition to your fortune I alluded to."

"I—I—really did not take notice of what you were saying. Tell me again."

"It is all told. When I found the woman inflexible, determined upon this heartless investment, I made a contract with her on your account—fancying that you would be more merciful to the sufferer

than the Jew dealers in annuities. You said just now that I was to set the lawyers at work and pile up your treasures; if I obey your instructions, Miss St. Cyr should be apprised at once in order that she may give up her present style of living, and save as much from the wreckage as possible."

"You wouldn't act upon that advice if I gave it seriously, Doctor. I did not know what I was saying."

"Well, my boy, we must think about what is to be done. Quarter-day will soon be here, and the young woman will want money—she has already applied to the lawyer in Lincoln's Inn to know the state of her mother's affairs."

Tom pushed back his chair from the table, rested his elbow on his knee and his face upon his palm, and gave himself up to reflection.

The devil still lurked in Tom's heart—

it was a tenacious devil—one not to be expurgated by a simple, "Get thee behind me." It was prompting him now to base, ungenerous action. "Why should you give this girl the power to live a life that you detest?" it asked. "Humanity demands that you should give her enough to shield her from want; but Reason forbids that you should give her more than would suffice to meet her requirements. Is it not for her good that she should be withdrawn from temptation, taken away from the influence of an idle and vicious society? Will it not reveal to her the shallow friendship, the false affection of those about her, to reduce her to a humbler level? And as one by one these lordlings, and fops, and fortune-hunters drop away, will not she realise the worth of truer friends?"

As Tom listened to the suggestions of his own selfish jealousy, his face flushed

—he could feel the blood throbbing under his fingers, in the veins upon his temple, and he viewed with savage satisfaction the ignoble exercise of his power over Lady Betty, and then quickly came revulsion. He sickened at the thought of his own selfishness, his heart ached as he figured the poor girl's mortification in finding her mother exposed as a scheming, fraudulent woman, and her distress in finding that he whom she had trusted was heartless and mean.

"What are you thinking about, Tom?" asked Doctor Blandly, after casting one or two uneasy glances at the young man.

"Ah, indeed! What am I thinking about!" exclaimed Tom, raising himself with a gesture of disgust. "Myself—self—self—always myself." He thrust his hand in his pocket, and drawing out a paper, said: "Look at that, Doctor, and

tell me if it will answer my purpose."

Dr. Blandly put aside his plate—the famous cheese had lost its flavour as he marked Tom's agitation—drew out his spectacle-case, took a pinch of snuff, settled his glasses carefully, and then opened the paper.

This is what he read:

"I, Thomas Talbot, of Talbot Hall, Sevenoaks, in Kent, do give the whole of my property, my lands, buildings, goods, and money to Benjamin Blandly, M.D., of Edmonton, in Middlesex, to be divided equally, and as he thinks justly, at my death, between ( ) and Elizabeth St. Cyr, of Park Lane, London. And this is my will and testament, written in the month of July and the year of grace, one thousand and eight hundred."

There was a furrow in Doctor Blandly's

forehead when he commenced to read; it grew deeper as he continued.

When he came to the conclusion, he slowly turned the paper over as if he expected to find something further on the back, then he laid it down on the table, and looking straight through his glasses at Tom, said in a tone of perplexity:

"What the devil does all this mean, my boy?"

"I am going out with a man to-morrow morning, Doctor—that's all."

"That's all! and quite enough too, I think. So you are going out to cut a man's throat, hey?"

"The probability is that he will cut mine, for I know about as little of the use of a small sword as a woman."

"Then more fool you to fight. What is your quarrel?"

"I have insulted a gentleman—I left him no option but to challenge me."

"What do you mean by an insult? It isn't in you to offer anyone a gratuitous affront."

"I assure you the fault is entirely mine."

"Then the noblest thing you can do is to apologise."

"I considered that a mean way of evading punishment, and refused to retract my words. The seconds arranged everything before I left town, and we meet to-morrow morning. I should fight if for no other reason than that I bear my father's name."

"What better reason have you?" asked Doctor Blandly sharply.

"None. My adversary is a gentleman and a cool hand. He will let me off with a flesh wound, I expect—if not, what matter? I am a useless, purposeless man."

"How dare you say that, Tom. It is blasphemy to say that a single thing

that God has put upon this earth is useless."

Tom was silent.

Doctor Blandly with a frown took up the paper and read it again.

"What is this blank space intended for?" he asked.

"A name that I shall fill in."

"Hum!" grunted the Doctor, "the aforesaid Benjamin Blandly, M.D., I suppose."

He folded the paper and laid it down; then he looked straight before him for a couple of minutes. He rose from his seat and walked in silence to the window, which looked out upon his beloved water-meadows and the peaceful stream, and then he softly whistled the first bar of his favourite ditty, "Up came a Pedlar," &c., broke off suddenly, slowly drew out his Indian silk handkerchief—a gift of Tom's—and took off his glasses to

wipe from them a humidity that had clouded the tender landscape before him.

"There is not much to dread, Doctor; the man feels kindly towards me, I know."

"Oh, confound his kindness! 'tis of a piece with your gentlemanly mode of expressing regret for an affront." The Doctor took a pinch of snuff, which seemed to restore his vigour. "Well, Tom, I see no way out of it," he said, turning to the table again, and taking up the paper; "go and fight, if honour demands it of you, and may God answer your old friend's prayer and save you for a better fate than death by an English hand. As for this paper, 'tis enough. An alteration of one or two words, and the signature of a couple of witnesses, will make it as effective as needs be. Will you finish the day with me, Tom?"

"I have arrangements yet to make."

"Ah, well, well! Baxter and Jerry shall put their names here, and we will say good-bye. Good-bye! What a word, my boy! Good-bye! Think on it! And you a young, hearty fellow, while I ——"

"Come, Doctor, I have need of all my strength; don't shake my heart."

"Not I, my boy, not I. Go and pink your man and come rattling along to me, with the look of triumph in your eye that used to kindle in your old father's when he told of his tough fights. But I would to God your foe was not an Englishman. Who is he, my boy?"

"You are not likely to know him, Sir. A young gentleman of the town—Mr. Gerard Crewe."

"Gerard Crewe!" exclaimed the Doctor, dropping from his hand the inkpot he was carrying to the table.

"Yes, Sir. Do you know him?"

The Doctor sat down, evidently much agitated.

"Yes," he said, under his breath. Then, suddenly striking the table with his fist, he cried, "Tom, you musn't fight that man."

"Fight!" echoed Tom, with a short laugh, "I don't know how; but I shall stand up before him to a certainty. What do you know of him?"

The Doctor took no notice of the question, but sat in deep thought until Tom repeated it.

"I know him for a dangerous man, a man you are not called upon to meet. His brother is a highwayman."

"Are you sure of that?" asked Tom, jumping up in excitement.

"Certain."

"You believe him to be a man without

principle—a hypocrite?" Tom asked, with increased force.

Doctor Blandly, concluding from Tom's altered manner that he was glad to see a means of escaping from a meeting which his own weakness had necessitated, replied:

"I cannot tell you all that I know of him, but I have little reason to doubt that he is capable of precipitating a quarrel with a sinister motive."

"Then I will meet him with a light heart," cried Tom, springing from his seat. "If he is a villain all that I suspected is true, and nothing will please me better than to have at him."

CHAPTER V.

DOCTOR BLANDLY'S OPPOSITION.

GERARD CREWE was seated in the long room at Brooke's, when the man with whom he was in conversation said:

"Who is the new arrival attracting so much attention? A country gentleman who has lost his way apparently."

Gerard turned his head, and looking over his shoulder perceived that the portly gentleman standing in the centre of the room, his legs apart, his stick planted firmly on the ground, his chin

up, his pouting lips drawn down at the corners, and his eyes scanning successively the players at each separate table, was Doctor Blandly.

"A very worthy friend of mine, and possibly seeking me," said Gerard. "You will permit me — ?" He rose, exchanged bows with his friend, and walked up to the visitor.

"Are you looking for me, Doctor Blandly ?" he asked.

The Doctor turned without altering the set expression of his face, and looking him full in the face, answered :

"Yes, Mr. Gerard Crewe, I am. I wish to speak to you."

"Will you speak to me here, or will you accompany me to a room where we shall be to ourselves."

"A private room, if you please."

Gerard conducted the Doctor into a cabinet adjoining the long room. It was

unoccupied. Gerard closed the door and placed a chair for his visitor.

"You have challenged Mr. Talbot," said Doctor Blandly, opening the subject without preamble.

"I have," Gerard replied, with quiet gravity.

"Well, Sir, the meeting must not take place."

"*Must* not take place?"

"You must not draw your sword upon Mr. Talbot."

Gerard made a kind of interrogative movement with his delicate hands, and waited for an explanation.

"In the first place I appeal to you as a gentleman and a man of honour. Mr. Talbot has no skill with the weapon he is to use; in all likelihood he never drew a rapier in his life. Do you think it fair then to take advantage of the superiority which you doubtless

as a man of the world have over him?"

"The choice of weapons was with him. I am willing to use pistols if he prefers them."

"Pistols! a confounded murderous contrivance."

"May I ask if you have come on behalf of Mr. Talbot?"

"Yes; but without his knowledge. He seems more anxious to fight than you are — hang him! He's a hot-headed young gentleman, and from what I can learn it is as like as not that his quarrel arose from a mistake. Now can a misunderstanding, which a few words would set right, justify you in jobbing at each other like a pair of heathen savages?"

"I have no choice. You must address your arguments to Mr. Talbot. I have offered him the option of apologising."

"He cannot apologise; he comes of a breed that never did apologise."

"Then the meeting is inevitable."

"I have appealed to your sense of honour and humanity, I will appeal now to your feeling of gratitude. To Tom Talbot and his father you owe all that you have to be thankful for—rescue from the lowest depth of poverty and vice; education, and a sufficient yearly allowance to ensure you from returning to your original condition."

Gerard inclined his head.

"You knew this then?" said Doctor Blandly, sharply.

"I suspected it."

Doctor Blandly did not know what to make of Gerard's imperturbable calmness. Predisposed to think ill of the gamester, he set it down to cool indifference, and after taking a pinch of snuff and scowling side-long at Gerard, he re-

commenced with increased ascerbity in his tone.

"Now, Mr. Crewe, I will attack you on new ground, and forsaking the supposition that you are a gentleman, a man of honour, or a person with ordinary feelings of gratitude, I will take it for granted that you have a tolerably deep regard for your own pecuniary interests. Let me tell you that this annual payment to you and your brother is made entirely independent of any claim that you can produce, and totally at my discretion; and I warn you that if you but scratch the skin of Tom Talbot, neither you nor Barnabas shall ever receive another penny of his money. Now, then, what have you to say to that?"

"What you have said does not alter my original intention."

"Then you knew the facts that I have stated?" said the Doctor, sharply.

"I suspected the truth."

"Who hinted it to you?"

"My brother Barnabas."

Doctor Blandly looked at Gerard's cold unemotional face in perplexity for a moment, then clapping his hands loud on the elbows of his chair, he cried in a tone of horror:

"Good God! can it be that you know all! that you are in conspiracy with that vile wretch Barnabas to rob Tom not only of his——" he checked himself abruptly, and then speaking to himself rather than addressing Gerard, "No, I cannot believe that, it is impossible!"

"Finish your charge, Doctor Blandly."

"Tell me what you know of Tom Talbot—of his father!"

"I can only repeat what you have said; I know no more."

Doctor Blandly drew a long sigh of relief, and seemed at a loss to know how

to proceed. After waiting a minute in silence for him to speak, Gerard put his hand in his breast-pocket, and drawing out a case, said:

"I am not wealthy, Doctor Blandly, but, for a gamester, I am thrifty. I have contrived to amass this little bundle of notes, which for the last five or six months I have guarded carefully, hoping to have, sooner or later, a confirmation of my belief. You will find that they discharge, as far as money goes, my obligations to the Talbot family. I do not ask for an explanation of this mysterious generosity, I only ask for an extension of it by being allowed to purchase my independence."

"Good God!" exclaimed Doctor Blandly, sinking back in his chair, and adjusting his spectacles that he might look with perfect clearness at Gerard, then he repeated, "Good God!"

"And now," said Gerard, "you may perhaps see no reason why I should not meet Mr. Talbot to-morrow morning?"

"No reason! that's good! The reason is stronger than ever, for if I was in doubt about you before, I am certain now. Gerard —" He rose to his feet, and grasped the young man's cold thin fingers in his warm plump hand. "As there is a heaven above us you shall not stain your sword with Tom's blood."

"For a final reason, Sir, why not?"

"Why not? because he is your brother!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIGHT.

THE interview continued for half-an-hour longer, then Doctor Blandly and Gerard Crewe left the house together, walked into the Strand, and separated amicably at the hotel where the Doctor had arranged to stay for the night.

Gerard returned to Brooke's, where he stayed all night, risking a few pounds at a faro-table, but playing neither continuously or with interest, and rather, as it seemed, to beguile the time than to

win money. At five o'clock he was joined by two gentlemen, and they conversed in the cabinet where Doctor Blandly had sat with Gerard, until about half-past five, when a fourth gentleman entered the room.

"The carriage is at the door, are we all ready?" he asked, after exchanging hurried salutations with the company.

"Quite, as far as I am concerned," answered Gerard.

The other gentlemen expressed their readiness, and all four at once descended to the street, where a carriage with a pair of horses was waiting. A couple of rapiers and a mahogany case were on the seat; the seconds took the swords between their knees, the surgeon nursed his property, and Gerard having seated himself, the carriage started off.

At ten minutes before six they were on

foot again, and making their way down an avenue of the park, Gerard and a second in advance, the other second with the surgeon following.

It was a grey morning, a drizzling rain had been falling, and drops still fell from the trees. Gerard looked up at the heavens with anxiety; an inky cloud was sweeping up under the grey veil that covered the sky.

"A mighty bad morning for our business," said the second. "If it rains will you toss for sides, and take the chance of getting the drift in your eyes, or play under the oak?"

"Under the oak," answered Gerard.

His second looked at him with surprise.

Gerard stepped aside from the path and tried the grass.

"'Tis dangerously slippery," he said.

"That gives you the advantage, with your cool hand; our adversary will slip about like an eel in his impetuosity. All you have to do is to stand still and pink him."

"You understand distinctly that I offer Mr. Talbot the option of apology."

"Certainly—you don't feel nervous, do you, Crewe?"

"I never felt less firm in my life."

"Ah! you ought to have turned into bed for a few hours like a rational being, instead of sitting up all night in that hot room. However, you have nothing to fear. Ah! here we are."

Turning the angle and coming in sight of the King's Oak, they perceived standing under its wide spread boughs, Tom Talbot, with his two friends. A slight shiver ran through Gerard's frame, which was observed by his seconds. The black cloud came nearer. Having approached

within a dozen yards of the oak, the party stopped. Gerard remained with the surgeon while the principals on both sides stepped forward to meet each other.

"Do you stick to your odds, Athol?" asked the second who had been walking with Gerard.

"Yes, twenty to one on our man—in fifties."

"Done," and then the two gentlemen saluted the others, and proceeded with the usual preliminaries. Gerard had turned his eyes away, and not looked at Tom after the moment that he first caught sight of him. The cloud had come over the oak and the rain was now falling in heavy drops. The seconds returned, saying that Mr. Talbot refused to make any kind of apology.

"And the rain—what is settled about that?" asked Gerard.

"It is a matter of indifference to Mr. Talbot. He gives you the choice."

"Then we will fight under the oak."

The seconds interchanged a quick glance, Mr. Athol looking the less cheerful of the two. Under the oak the rain was not felt, except in the occasional plash of accumulated drops, but the grass was not less slippery. Having taken off his coat, waistcoat and cravat, Gerard kicked off his shoes. Again the seconds glanced significantly at each other; then everything being ready the principals advanced, Tom with his eyes fixed on his opponent—Gerard with his eyes upon the ground, until the moment that they were within a couple of paces of each other. For a moment they stood looking at each other full in the eyes. Tom, with an expression of dogged resolution on his square, English face. Gerard with firmly set lips, and brow contracted rather in appre-

hension than anger. They saluted, measured swords, recovered, and crossed.

Thus far Tom had acted upon the instruction he had received in the lesson taken over night, but now ignorant of the *finesse* and delicate play upon which the duellist's safety depends, he trusted for success to a quick and strong attack. The slight figure of his adversary, the consciousness of his own physical strength, gave him confidence, he saw nothing to prevent him plunging his sword through Gerard's body at once; bracing the muscles of his right hand and arm, he made a heavy lounge. To his utter astonishment the point of his sword was turned aside by a mere turn of Gerard's wrist, and he knew, as he clumsily recovered, that he was at his antagonist's mercy, and that it was in gallant con-

sideration for his helplessness, that Gerard spared him.

"What on earth is Crewe about?" whispered Mr. Athol to his companion. "He might have pinked his man and finished the business, had he used the opportunity."

Once more Tom lounged, shortening his sword and throwing the weight of his body upon it; with a quick movement Gerard drew away, turning the point wide of its mark.

"Now," murmured Mr. Athol, stamping his foot, in expectation of the final *coup*, as the top of Tom's shoulder lined with Gerard's breast. "Great heavens! he has not touched him, when he might have spitted him down the middle like a capon."

Nettled with his own want of skill, Tom, as soon as he recovered, recommenced the attack, and plunged wildly

again and again at his adversary, until at length, perceiving, what to the seconds was obvious from the first, that he had no chance of success, and that the only use Gerard made of his superiority was to foil his attempts, he threw down his rapier, and stood with his hands down for his adversary to do what he would. Exasperated with defeat, he would willingly at that moment, have received Gerard's point upon his breast; he was quite unprepared for any other result, and when Gerard threw down his sword also, and stepping forward, extended his open right hand, he hesitated a moment, at a loss to know how to act.

Doctor Blandly had said the man was a rascal and a hypocrite, but judging him by his own experience, could he prove a single departure from the behaviour of a friend and a gentleman. All his suspicions were based upon the sup-

position that Gerard was false, but with this convincing proof of loyalty those suspicions were unjust and indefensible. If Tom was ashamed of being beaten and reluctant to yield to a foe, he was by the same principle unwilling to be outdone in generosity, or to hold out against the advances of a friend, and so after that brief moment of doubt and hesitation, he gave his hand frankly to Gerard, saying: "I have behaved unhandsomely, and I ask your forgiveness."

CHAPTER VII.

AFTER THE FIGHT.

TOM walked off the field with a hang-dog look, and made no response to the cheerful congratulations of his seconds. It was not in his nature to underrate his own shortcomings, or to look on the cheerful side of defeat.

"I have made a fool of myself—insulted my friends, and been beaten," he said to himself.

His adversary's generosity aggravated

his mortification. He declined to take a place with his seconds in the carriage that was waiting for them; he thanked them very civilly for their services, and went his own way, without even asking them to breakfast with him. He sat in his chamber with his hands buried in his pockets, thinking of his faults until he felt absolutely sick, and the girl brought a tray laid with a substantial breakfast. He ate heartily, and finding his sickness considerably lessened, he rose from the table with vigour, sat down at a desk and wrote this letter.

"Dear Doctor,—

"I have been thoroughly beaten, but my adversary generously contented himself with a bloodless victory, though he might have done my business a dozen times. I honestly believe you are mistaken in him. As far as concerns my

quarrel with Mr. Gerard Crewe, I am convinced that all the blame was on my side, and as I reflect that a couple of hours ago I was doing my best to stick a small sword through his heart, I feel heartily ashamed that I took no better pains to prove the truth of my suspicions beforehand.

"I shall leave London by the first coach that starts for Sevenoaks, and there I shall stay till the madness which hath afflicted me to the discomfort of those I most love, shall have passed off. With regard to Miss St. Cyr, since fate has decided that she is not to have the half of my fortune, I beg that you will continue to place at her disposal the same annual amount paid to the late Mrs. St. Cyr, and I trust to your kindness to make the payment in such a manner that she may not know her mother's fault, nor the source from which the money comes. In

conclusion, my dear friend, I ask you to believe me ever—

"Your grateful and devoted,

TOM TALBOT."

Having despatched this letter, Tom had nothing else to do than to lock up his chamber and walk to the "Blue Boar" in Holborn. Nevertheless he stood irresolute upon his path for some time with his face due north. On the right hand lay Holborn, on the left Stanhope Street.

"I am going away for weeks—perhaps for months," thought he. "May I not hang about for a couple of hours or so to catch a last glimpse of her. She need not see me, I will do nothing to renew her pain. One glimpse of her—God knows, 'tis little enough to face the dreary solitude of months withal! The clouds have broken, and she may go for a

drive in an hour." He cast his eye westwards. "But suppose that by accident she sees me—we must speak, and then farewell to my fine resolutions. What a feeble fool I am. Hang me, if I give in!" And with that he deliberately turned his face to the east, and marched with steadfast firmness—for nearly two hundred yards, when he stopped dead short, struck with the recollection that the coach did not leave the "Blue Boar" until one o'clock.

Looking at his watch, he found that it wanted yet a quarter of eleven. He could walk to the "Blue Boar" in half an hour —a hackney-coach would carry him there in twenty minutes; why should he spend a miserable hour in Holborn when the air of the West End was so much more pleasant? There was but one logical answer to be made to this question, so he turned about, and with a lighter and

quicker step, made his way to the Park, taking a seat by the drive, whence he could see those who came and went for a long distance. If Lady Betty came out this morning she would pass this seat; but he could see her afar and retire in time to escape her notice.

* * * * *

Mrs. Walker was the centre of fashionable gossip. It flowed to her in little streams as to a reservoir, and the great world came to drink. She had a host of humble admirers, whose visits she encouraged if they only brought interesting items of news. An hour after Tom had engaged two friends to support him in his duel, the intelligence was carried to Mrs. Walker, and though in consideration for Lady Betty she retailed the important information in secret to her visitors, it reached the girl's quick ear before nightfall, and for a time so overwhelmed

her with horror and dread that she forgot the commonest convenances of society, and would have ran there and then to Tom's chambers and begged him for the love of her to withdraw from the engagement, had not Mrs. Walker, to avoid such an indecency, assured her that Mr. Talbot had changed his abode. Then she wished to write to Mr. Crewe imploring him to hold his hand, but fortunately Mrs. Walker contrived to delay the sending of the letter until she had made her young friend see that honour and polite usage both forbade any interference with gentlemen engaged in the genteel business of seeking each other's lives.

Yet though she was induced to submit to the guidance of her friend, no arguments could make her look at the affair as a delicate compliment to herself which she would one day look back upon with

pride; and nothing could keep her from bursting into tears at the mention of the men's names. She liked Gerard, she loved Tom—she lingered to listen to the conversation touching the duel with the fascination that attracts women to look upon a terrible possibility; but when the subject was exhausted, she escaped to her room and gave herself up to grief.

It was so awful to think that for a simple misunderstanding the man who had befriended her, who, she knew, in his heart loved her sincerely, should die, and be for ever lost to her. Lady Betty was careless, frivolous, and thoughtless, but she was not heartless. She loved Tom more thoroughly than he in his jealousy could love her. She would have risked her life to spare him pain, but he in his selfishness risked his life only thinking that it would be good

to be rid of a tiresome existence, and without consideration of the grief his loss would produce upon Lady Betty.

Lying sleepless in the dark the imagination is active, the reason torpid. As she lay upon her comfortless bed a hundred wild schemes for preventing the combat passed in review before Lady Betty's mind, and when the first glimpse of dawn entered the window, she jumped up determined to escape from the house before the servants were about, and go to the park, where she had heard the meeting was to take place, and throw herself between the swords of her lover and her friend.

Before she was safely out of the house she perceived that her project, so feasible in its first conception, was no more than a forlorn hope. The precise time of meeting was doubtful—the exact spot unknown except to principals and seconds,

who were bound to keep it secret. She knew that she should offend Mrs. Walker; she feared that if she were fortunate enough to find the party and prevent the fight, her interposition would only result in a postponement of the duel; but all these arguments combined failed to divert her from attempting that which was possible to her; and her courage was proof against the suggestions of danger which she felt in going out alone and unprotected at that early hour. Muffled in a dark cloak and hood she hurried into the park, and quitting the main passage speedily lost herself. It astonished her to find how wide and wild the park was—for she had never before left the drive and its adjoining avenues.

Mist shrouded the distance, and she hurried along ignorant of the course she took. Hazard led her past the King's

Oak an hour before the party she sought arrived, and at the moment that the duel was taking place, she was far from the spot, standing in the long wet grass and falling rain, looking around her in blank despair, dismayed with her solitude, and shivering with excitement and cold.

Another hour of fruitless wandering and she found herself again in the same spot. Her tears, which had been withheld by hope, now coursed down her cheeks. She felt like a lost child. When she came into the avenue, which she recognised as that in which she had sat with Tom on the first day of her going out after her mother's death, hope was gone, and she sat down to recover her strength, feeling utterly worn out and wretched. The clouds were breaking and showed that the morning was far advanced.

"All is over now," she thought, and then knowing that the result of the duel would be known early at Stanhope Street, she rose quickly left the park—a renewed anxiety giving her strength. She re-entered the house at the moment that the servants were making inquiries about the unfastened chains and bolts upon the door. They stared in blank astonishment to see her, deadly white and in a cloak sodden with rain. In reply to her rapid questioning, they said that as yet no visitors or messengers had arrived, and asked her if she knew it was only just turned of eight.

She tried to walk up-stairs, and stopped after the first few steps, clinging to the banister. A maid ran up, helped her to reach her room, and then leaving her ran down to get hot coffee for the poor exhausted girl. The re-

freshment restored her. She would not lie down; but having changed her dress descended to the library, whence she could see the approaches to the house, and there she waited, sitting by the window.

An open carriage drove up to the door at half-past nine, with Gerard and Mr. Athol. As Gerard put his foot upon the steps the door opened, and he saw Lady Betty standing before him white as a ghost.

"What has happened?" she cried pressing forward to meet him.

"Nothing to pain you," answered Gerard. "I have shaken hands with Mr. Talbot, and neither of us has received a scratch."

Then Lady Betty began to laugh, while the tears dripped from her face.

There was breakfast and Mrs. Walker

in the morning-room, and thither Lady Betty led Gerard with hysterical gaiety.

They sat at table until half-past ten, and then Gerard, seeing that Lady Betty was still in an unnatural state of excitement, proposed that they should go for a drive. Mrs. Walker declined, the hour being yet too early for her to appear in public, but agreed that it would be well for Lady Betty to take the air. So Lady Betty ran up to her room and arrayed herself in her best to celebrate the day, and took her seat in the carriage radiant with renewed joy.

The fresh air did not allay her excitement, and as she entered the park she laughed to think how miserably wretched she had wandered there but a few hours since. She was in a mood to look at all things in their gayest, brightest aspect. She laughed at every jest, and

Mr. Athol, who had not hitherto been encouraged to regard himself as a wit, flattered with the reception given by Lady Betty to his slightest rallies, exerted himself to the utmost to be agreeable and witty.

And so, bright and beautiful, her mourning-dress discarded, and replaced with a costume of coquettish fashion, her face beaming with sunny mirth, untinged with the shadow of a single grave reflection, she passed before Tom's eyes, passed, sitting beside the man who had challenged him, and *vis-à-vis* with the grinning dandy who had served as a second.

"I might be dead and buried, and the very stone rotting over me, for all she thinks of me," said Tom, with a groan.

Then he turned his down-cast face towards Holborn, having now no further wish to gratify.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE "LONE CROW."

ON the outskirts of Woking village stood an inn called the "Lone Crow," a broken-down inn that had lost all traces of respectability, if ever it had pretended to respect. The stable-gate was broken and patched with a piece of the broken horse-trough, the windows were broken and stuffed with otherwise useless articles of apparel, a corner of the square brick-chimney was broken, the thatch was broken and mended here and there with tufts of

heather, and last of all the sign was broken, and only the tail end of the "lone crow" was left in the frame.

It was six in the evening, and the rain which had been falling with steady persistency since midday, fell still with undiminished pertinacity; nevertheless, a traveller with ordinary scruples would have declined to take shelter there, though all other inns in Woking were full, and he had to trudge on to Bagshot for a bed.

Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe, however, was as free from ordinary scruples as the host of the "Lone Crow" could desire, and so, when he caught sight of the inn, whose dismal exterior was to some degree redeemed by the reflected glow of a fire upon the dirty surviving panes of the window, he reined up his steed, and as Slink came to his heels, said:

"This looks like a good inn; we

will put up here out of the cursed weather."

Slink might have had his doubts about the appearance of the inn, but he was entirely at one with his master respecting the weather, so he slipped off his gasping horse without a word, and applied the butt of his whip to the stable-gate.

"Hei! hei! hei!" called the host from within, in response to the vigorous appeal, "do you want to knock the blessed gate off its hinges?"

"It wouldn't be much the worse for a new pair," said Slink, regarding the ingenious arrangement of old rope and shoe-leather by which the gate was connected with the post.

The host, having opened the door of the inn and seen at a glance the quality of his visitors, ran round to the back of the house, and with as much speed as

possible opened the gate, which was not to be done in the mere turning of a key, for several beams which served to shore it up had first to be removed, and then the gate required careful lifting in order that the weight and strain might not fall so heavily upon the shoe-leather as to over-tax its strength, which could have but one result —the fall and utter ruin of the gate.

"You'd best jump down here, Captain, and go into the house by the front-door; the yard's a bit moist-like with the damp," said the host. "I'll look arter the hosses."

"Oh no, you won't," said Barnabas, dismounting. "I want my horse fed; my man will look after the horses."

"Oh, that's your sort, is it?" said the host, sullenly. "Well, in that case, your man can get through the yard as he can.

He'll find the stable right afore him, and the clover up in the loft."

Slink waded to the building indicated, through the muck of years which festered in the yard.

The stable was in a better state of repair than the house, because, perhaps, the proprietor, not feeling himself called upon to regard external appearances in that which was less exposed to the public notice, had not patched it. It was as Nature had made it, an unpretentious ruin. At the dry end of the barn—it made no pretence to be a stable, except in having a trough against the wall, and a horsey smell—were a cow and an ass, which Slink promptly removed to make room for his own cattle, whose well-being was now the sole object of all his cares and hopes.

Meanwhile, the landlord of the "Lone Crow"—a thick-set, heavy man, with a

broken nose and other facial peculiarities of a pugilist—having shored up his gate, returned to his tap-room, where he found his guest carefully arranging his wet coat and hat upon chairs in front of the fire. He stood looking on in silence, turning a straw over in his mouth, until Barnabas turned and perceived him.

"You've got the fire all to yourself, Captain," he remarked.

"Yes, and I want something more. I'm told you have sausages in the house. Let me have them at once, and get your best bed-room straight. We shall stay all night."

"Oh, will you!" The landlord spat out the straw, and then continued: "Look here, Captain, I don't waste no time, 'fibbin' and no feintin' 's' my motter. Money down, old Trust's dead. 'No money no match,' and that's another of my motters."

"Confound your motters! Do you suppose a gentleman's going to pay his reckoning before its due?"

"I don't want to know nothing about no gentlemen, and if I did it ain't very likely I should ask *you* for information. I may have had more gents a-backing me than ever you dreamed on. Anyway, I want a crown down and your sturrups."

"And supposing I don't choose to give a crown down and my stirrups—what then?"

"Why then, Captain, out ye go. You can walk out or I'll put you out, which you like—and your man after you, and your horses after him. I'm not particular if it comes to a turn-up. A fair warning and no favour shown is what I say."

"You're forgetting yourself, my fine fellow," said Barnabas, disliking the look of things.

"Don't you fear, the Woking Walloper's got too good an opinion of hisself to forget who he is."

"Oh, if you're the Woking Wollopper that makes a difference. You can go and take the stirrups."

"And the crown?"

"There." Barnabas threw down a crown-piece with reluctance.

"That's business. Now we'll shake hands and lead off. I'll take care of the sturrups; they shan't leave my sight, you may wager. Will you cook the sausages yourself?"

"Yes."

"Then the missis shall bring 'em to you. Now we know each other. 'Make your match and come to the scratch,' there's a motter for you!"

When Slink entered the tap-room he found his master in his shirt-sleeves a-straddle before the scorching fire that

burnt upon the hearth, shielding his face with one arm, while with the other hand he held a long-handled frying-pan in which a couple of pounds of sausages were hissing and sizzling over the embers. Slink disposed of his wet coat, and sat down with that patient silence and immobility which characterises country servants in the presence of their proper lords.

In due course master and man dined together, the Wallopper supplying their wants with the utmost assiduity now that they had shaken hands and were working steady, according to the rules of the ropes, as he put it. He even brought a pair of shoes for Slink to wear while his own dilapidated boots—which had been given him in exchange for the perfectly sound pair that the Lieutenant now wore—were drying.

After dinner Barnabas lit a long clay

pipe, cleared a corner of the table, drew up his chair so as to command a view of the fire, and bringing a pack of dirty cards from his pocket, nodded to Slink, who, in response, placed his chair *vis-à-vis* with his master, and heaving a deep sigh of resignation, licked his finger and thumb. With indefatigable patience Barnabas had taught his follower to play piquet, and now reaped the reward of his pains by repeatedly fleecing him every night of what change remained from the sum he had given him in the morning.

There was no play in the game, for Slink had to make all his calculations with his fingers, and was slow at that. But Barnabas had a certain sense of humour which was tickled by the errors of his adversary, and the simplicity with which he allowed himself to be tricked. Besides that, it was agreeable to him to cheat at all times, though he did

but win his own money by the transaction.

"How much money have you, Slink?" said Barnabas, drawing a card.

"Two shillings and a gr'at, your honour."

"Put it down on the table, then. Ah, you've won the draw. Deal."

Slink laid out his money, wetted his thumb and finger again, and dealt out the twenty-four cards, wishing from the bottom of his soul that he might be lucky enough to lose his two and fourpence by a single hand. But there was no such luck for him. His cards were so provokingly good that nothing but the ingenuity of Lieutenant Crewe prevented his making "capot" time after time. If, endeavouring to terminate the game, he threw away three aces, he picked up three kings of the same suits, and when he discarded a quint to the knave, he took

up another to the ace. Fortune opposed his losing, Barnabas took care that he should not win. Slink longed to be with his horses in the stable—to be anywhere except with his master playing piquet. It was otherwise with Barnabas. The difficulty of winning against such cards, and the necessity of having Slink's money, were a zest to the game which made him in no hurry to finish it.

With the villagers there had dropped in during the evening a pedlar, a loud, red-faced rascal, with a husky voice and an Irish brogue, who laid himself out to amuse the company, and succeeded to a marvel. He told stories with witty points, a little broad, perhaps, but such as all who heard could understand and laugh at; and he sang songs—Irish ballads, and the popular songs by Mr. Dibden, and all with the same chorus, in which everyone could join without

reference to the subject, words, or tune, and with an accompaniment of feet and empty pots.

Now Slink loved music; in his happier days he could himself sing when called upon, and also he admired wit of the broad kind; so when he heard the singing and laughter he felt that he could have given his ears to know what it was all about, and to join in the general jollity. But his master kept him to the game, challenging him and shouting out his points above the voice of the pedlar, and when he paused in his play to catch the point of a story or the burden of a song, Barnabas recalled him to a sense of duty by a smart kick on the shin, than which there are few other methods more speedily effective.

And so they played on until the villagers went home, and the pedlar retired, and the candle guttered down to

the socket, and the unhappy Slink was so bewildered that he could not tell the difference between the king of diamonds and the ace of spades. Then the landlord of the house came and interfered.

"Captain," said he, "it's time to pull up the stakes for this bout. There's a time for everything, as the motter says."

"Another candle," demanded Barnabas. Slink groaned.

"No more candles to-night, Captain. And as you don't know your way about the premises, I advise you to go to bed while your wick's burning."

"In that case, Slink, this must be a drawn game, and—" sweeping up the money, "so we are quits."

"Oh, fair and square!" interfered the landlord. "I'll get a candle if you're in the middle of a round."

"No—the master's won—we're quits," cried Slink, throwing up the cards, hastily.

"Well, if it's a drawn match—both principals agreeing—it's another thing; and now I'll show you the way to your room. There's a bed for you Captain, and another for your man."

"Much obliged to you, master, but the loft for me," said Slink.

The privilege of sleeping in hay-lofts was jealously maintained by Slink, because in the first place, it was more agreeable to lie upon clean straw than in the musty rooms of the inns they frequented, and secondly, it afforded him a temporary escape from the society of Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE LOFT.

HAVING shaken some fresh clover in the trough, and given a parting caress to his horses, Slink, lantern in hand, scaled the ladder set perpendicularly against the wall, and scrambled on to the floor of the loft.

"Hilloa! Who goes?" cried a voice from the obscurity.

Slink raised his lantern, and looking in the direction from which the voice proceeded, perceived a man well bedded in straw, sitting up between the trusses of

hay which he had arranged as a protection against the wind. Slink's face, which had lengthened considerably on hearing the voice, expanded into a broad smile of satisfaction as he recognised the features of the jovial pedlar.

"Ah thin, 'tis you, my noble gamester, what's come to take up your quarthers wid me, eh?" the pedlar said cheerfully, seeing the face beyond the lantern.

"If you've no objection, master."

"Devil a one. There's enough rats for the both of us, and I'm not graedy. You've a taste of the quality wid ye that tuk me fancy when I see you a playin' for silver wid your masther. Come, we'll raconstruct the apartment and spind a pleasant hour together."

"You don't play piquet, do you?" Slink asked, with apprehension.

"Piquet—sure I played ut wance when I was in the army every night of my life—

and I've forgotten it entoirely. But if nothin' but gamin' will contint ye—ye gamblin spicleative divil, I'll play yer at all-fours, shove-h'p'ny, or any other ginteel divilment."

"I'd rather listen to one of those songs of yours with a chorus."

"Yir a flattherer for certain—an' would you sincarely love to hear a ballid?"

"By the lord Harry, I would; and if you can tell one of those stories again that made all the folk laugh."

"I nivir repate, but if it's stories you want, sure I'll contint ye. A bit more straw and another bundle of hay will make us as comfortable as a couple of pigs in a sty. Holy saints, we will make a night of it—give us another bundle of hay, darlint; and if you can pull the shate so as keep the rain tother side of the hole in the roof t'will be nater and swater."

The "shate" alluded to was the cover of a cart propped against the roof by the posts of an old bedstead and the trunk of an apple-tree to preserve the hay from the rain that drifted through the broken roof. Slink re-arranged this contrivance with beneficial effect, while the pedlar opened his pack, dived into one corner and brought out a stone bottle.

"There," said he, as Slink returned and entered the nest they had made with the hay—"take the trouble to put your nose to that, and tell me what is your true opinion of ut?"

"It smells good," said Slink.

"And you'll find that it tastes aqual, for it's not only a smell you shall have of it—it's the rael gintale usquebaugh—a liquor that's too good to be drunk in solitude. 'Tis like love an' fightin' and all the blessed gifts of natur, only to be enjoyed by a couple whose hearts respond to the

swate influence of each other's society."

"I'm your man," said Slink, sententiously.

"By Saint Moses, yir my friend, sorr!" The pedlar had already tasted the usquebaugh, and his soul was touched with characteristic celerity. "Y'are about the finest Saxon and the bist friend I iver had in my life. Give us your hand, and putt your lips to the delicate mouth of the bottle. If ye hadn't woke me up, by the powers I shouldn't have gone to sleep agin for the rest of the right. I'm about the miserablest man to be alone that iver molested society; but with a companion to talk to and a bottle to drink at—whurroh! pass the darlint to me."

"Will you sing a song, now?"

"Will I sing you a song! hunthreds. What shall it be somethin' meltin and swate like the 'Leather Breeches," or somethin nate and purty about swateheartin'."

"Sweethearting," said Slink, with a sigh for his lost Jenny.

Without any preliminary hesitation, the pedlar sang an Irish ballad, and with such tenderness, that Slink, who thought of Jenny all the while, was moved to tears at the third verse. Flattered by this tribute to his power the pedlar, who like the rest of his countrymen, was an excellent emotionalist, redoubled his efforts, and absolutely wept in sympathy, when Slink having tried in vain to assuage his tears with the back of his hand, laid his arm on the hay and his face on his arm, and sobbed.

"Take a taste from the bottle, my friend," said the pedlar, when he had finished.

Slink held out his hand, and as he took the bottle, murmured in a voice still choked with grief:

"Now let's have a story."

"Ah, and you're a man after my own

heart. Ye'd smoile an' soigh by turns. Did y' ever hear of the old woman who lost her darning-needle ?"

"No-oh-oh-oh !" answered Slink, laughing in anticipation, as a vague suspicion of the highly diverting circumstances in which she discovered the whereabouts of the missing article flashed across his mind. "No-oh-oh-oh !"

"It's a moighty divarting story, so here goes."

And he went forthwith, telling the simple anecdote with such dry humour that Slink had to hold his sides, cross his legs, and bend double under the painful difficulty of drawing breath, so violent was his laughter—finally in a feeble voice crying, "Don't — don't !" when the pedlar brought his story to the long withheld climax.

After that the pedlar sang "Tom Bowling," and for the sake of good-

fellowship introduced a chorus of "Derry, derry down," in which Slink exhibited the strength of his lungs with such prodigious effect, that the pedlar thought it wise to let him have the chorus all to himself, and merely marked time with his pipe, while he kept a steady eye on the rafters.

"Y'ave a foine voice, my darlint," said the pedlar, when the song was concluded—"A foine voice for the open air."

"Thank you, master. I'll sing you a song if you like."

"I shall appraciate the obligation. Let it be a throifle subdued, case the landlord should feel onaisey about his property."

Slink nodded, took a drink, wiped his lips, and with the simple annoucement, "'Are an' oun's, gents," sang that admirable song, "The Hare and the Hounds." After that the cocks for several miles round awoke and crowed in defiance.

CHAPTER X.

BLARNEY.

THE two friends continued their mutual entertainment long after the candle in the lantern had passed away. They could sing, and laugh, and cry just as well without a light as with it; the only difference that the darkness made to them was that the bottle had to be nursed with care, and handed backwards and forwards frequently for an assurance of its safety; but when the bottle was emptied their voices grew feebler, and unconsciously they fell asleep.

For awhile there was peace, but just as the outlines of objects became visible in the opening light of morning, two shrieks broke the stillness of the hour. Two shrieks in quick succession—the first from the pedlar, the second from Slink—and then followed a hurried diologue.

"My frind—my frind—have you got ut?"

"Got it? I should think I have—what is it?"

"A rat—a rat. I felt it at me throat. Holy saints! another moment and my veins would have been sucked—'twas a vampire. I saized um by the throat, and flung it into the atmosphaire."

"Yes, and it fell on my shin."

"And what have you done wid it?"

"Nothing. Lord Harry! it's broken my shin."

"And did you let it escape you afther all."

"Escape me—do you think I see it coming."

"And was it a vampire or a rat?"

"Rat, no! 'Twas the stone bottle."

"The stone bottle! Saints be praised for their marciful protection—look at that now!"

Slink had less reason to be grateful to the saints; and for some time he was occupied in ascertaining whether his shin-bone was broken or only the skin. However, having been able to walk across the loft with tolerable facility, he felt satisfied that he had nothing to deplore but a bruise, and was returning to his sympathising friend when he slipped his foot and uninjured leg through a hole in the rotten floor, and the pain of having his second shin barked soon made him

forget his original injury, which was a merciful dispensation of the all-protecting saints, which the pedlar did not fail to point out to the sufferer.

As it was impossible for Slink to sleep with his shins in such a tender condition that the slightest movement was painful, and as the pedlar was a man who would never sleep if he could get anyone to listen to him, and he was sober enough to talk, they reclined and conversed, with a gravity suited to the circumstances, and unavoidable now that the usquebaugh was drunk.

"Y' 'ave a jewel of a masther, my boy, that'll condiscend to make an aqual of ye, and play a frindly hand of cards wid ye now and then."

"Every night."

"Ye gamblin' divels! 'Tis a privilege y' have to be trated like a frind, but maybe its considthered in the wages.

How much moight y' have a month, now ?"

"I don't know 'zactly, about five shillings a day."

"Foive shilluns a day, darlint! Why 'tis as much as I make in a week, sometimes! An' what do you do wid it all ?"

"Lose it at cards."

"Ah! that makes it a bit aisy for the master. And what do you do, now, for your wages ?"

"Nothing."

"It is the masther that does the work, maybe ?"

Slink was silent; he had been cautioned to hold his tongue with respect to the Lieutenant's occupation, or to speak only in support of his character as an independent gentleman."

"P'raps ye'll tell me if he's a Captun ?" pursued the pedlar, with soft persuasiveness.

"He's a cut above a Captain, I can tell you, he's a Lieutenant."

"What a rale soldier? faith, then, we're as like as twin cherries, for I was a sergeant myself at wan time. And what regiment was he in?"

"You don't suppose he was in a regiment like a common soldier, do you? He was a Lieutenant all to himself; one of the independent Lieutenants."

"I appraciate the distinction, an' I respect the masther for it. I knew he was somethin' out of the common the first morment I saw him. He's not wan of your civil spokin' maley-mouthed varments; but a rale aristocrat, with a gintale curse and a scowl for anyone that asks him a civil question."

"Yes, that's him."

"The quality, my boy, quality. An' oi'l wager, now, he does nothin' in the

world at all but ride about the country brakun the hearts of the famale sex and a pickin' their pockuts."

"No, he don't," said Slink, in a tone of feeble opposition.

"Come, my boy, you're thrying to decaive me by sayin' nothun. You don't think I'm a dirty informer, that would sell the gallant Lieutentant to the constables for a paltry reward, do you?"

"Not I."

"Thin whoy should you try to decaive me? 'Tisn't behavin' like yeself at all. I didn't think you would be so mane after sharing my bottle of usquebaugh, and persuadin' me to sit up all the night a singin' ballads to ye, and tellin' all the best stories I knowed."

"I—I—I don't want to be mean. I'm very much obliged to you for your kindness. I—I never enjoyed myself better in all my life, and if I could repay you

for your kindness, I would with all my heart."

"But ye can niver repay me, darlint. Disinterested friendship is proiceless. So what does the masther do now, ridin' about wid a servant at his back?"

"Well, there's a rascal who owes him a lot of money, and—and he's looking about for him, and—and—and he don't seem to quite remember the looks of him, and—and—and when he meets anyone all alone, he just looks in his pocket to see if the money belongs to him, and—and if he's in doubt he takes it."

"I onderstand the natur' of the masther's misfortun' exactly; and what might you do all the time."

"Why I just stand ready to help master, if needs be; for if we meet the right rascal after all, it's more

an' likely he'll try to get away without paying."

"Just precoisely so." The pedlar repeated the words again and again, rather than be silent during the period he gave to reflection, then he said: "And y'are moighty fond of the profession, oi'l warrant."

Slink sighed.

"Ye like the divilment of it, and the hoigh wages, and the card playin, and all that." The pedlar waited some time for a response, and getting none, dropped his voice to the most seductive tone of blarney and continued—"Darlint! Oi love ye—oi love ye from the bottom of my heart. If I could do anything to sarve ye oi'd spare no ifforts. Now tell me, tell me true now—wud ye loike another sitiwation?"

Slink after a moment's feverish hesitation, bent over and whispered:

"I can't leave him, God help me."

"Whoy darlint?"

Slink dared not speak.

"Spake, my dear friend, spake. Trust me now."

"Take your oath you'll tell no one."

"I wad take my dyin' oath a dozen toimes, darlint. Do you think I would betray ye. Spake and trost me loike your own blessed mother."

"I—I was a simple sort of lad, once."

"And y'are simple, simple as the innocent sheep—g'on darlint."

"And I was so druv up into a corner like with the cruelty of my sweetheart, as I didn't half know what I was doing, and I met the Lieutenant, and he said he was a gentleman wanting a servant, and he persuaded me to run away from the Hall where I was groom, and he made me believe that I had the same right to take

the horse I rode as the livery I wore, and when I felt uneasy like about it, he gave me his horse and took mine to make me think I was safe, and then we began to go about the country, and raced the baker ——"

"Stop one moment—I don't quite understand the tarmes of the profession—and what do you mane by racing the baker?"

Slink recounted the adventure with the baker, and continued—"So things went on from bad to worse, till I see at last the whole truth when his honour robbed a butcher's wife of sixteenpence, and we had to bolt for our lives when we caught sight of a couple of constables at our heels. I was for giving back my horse and leaving the master next day, but he wouldn't accept the horse, and swore he would blow my brains out or give me up to the law and have me hanged for horse

stealing, if I didn't keep true to him. And now—I'm a ruined man, and may God forgive me."

"The Lieutenant is a ganius—he's got y'under his thumb, very nately. And I'd wager he's got the rale true Irish blood in his veins, for there's not another people that's got their ingenuity. What's his name, honey?"

"Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe."

"Say ut again, darlint." The pedlar, without changing the tone of his voice, spoke with rapidity and evident excitement.

"Barnabas Crewe."

"Barney Crewe! Faith 'tis a moighty odd accident. Tell me true now. Do you know anything of his family relations?"

"I have never seen any."

"You never heard him speak of them in his conversation wid ye?"

"We never have any conversation—except at piquet."

"He's got the small-pox, too, an' he moight be about thirty years of age."

"Yes; what of that?"

"You niver heard him spake of anyone? Now, recollect yourself, and don't spake till ye can answer."

"He used to ask a good many questions about my old master," Slink replied, after some minutes of reflection, "and Doctor Blandly."

"Docthor Blandly! An' what was your old master's name?"

"Admiral Talbot."

"Admiral Talbot! Merciful powers! An' has Barney seen the old Admiral?"

"The Admiral's dead."

"An' who's got the foine estate?"

"His son, Master Tom, I think."

"Bad cess to him!"

"What's the matter, master!"

"Nothun—nothun at all."

And with these words the pedlar concluded the conversation, and soon afterwards, without communicating his intention to Slink, he scrambled out of the straw and descended the ladder, leaving his companion in a state of complete mystification and dread.

CHAPTER XI.

REVELATION.

THE morning was yet early when Lieutenant Crewe was awoke by the fall of the chair he had set against the lock to keep the door fast.

"Who's there?" he called, shoving his hand under the pillow for his pistol.

"Only me, Barney, darlint," answered the pedlar, showing his head and shoulders.

"If it is only you I shall blow out your brains if you don't take yourself off."

The pedlar withdrew hastily as Bar-

nabas cocked the pistol, and spoke in his blandest tones from the safe side of the door.

"Barney, I've a matter of tremenjous importince to communicate to ye. Uncock your pistol, dear boy."

"What's the matter — the horses — Slink?"

"They're slaping loike the babe in the cot. 'Tis of family affairs I wish to spake wid ye."

"Family affairs?"

"Consarning the Crewes, and the Talbots, and the Docthor Blandly."

"Come in."

"Uncock your murthering pistol, darlint."

Without uncocking the weapon Barnabas made a sound with the lock as if he had, and slipped the pistol under the blanket. Thieves never feel safe.

"You're safe; come in," he called.

The pedlar entered, and after closing the door, drew near to the bed.

"That's near enough, don't come closer," said Barnabas, moving his hand under the blanket.

"Sure you've nothin' to fear from an old man loike me, and your own counthryman."

"Do you take me for a confounded teague?"

"And by that same token y'are. And what foiner proof could be wanted than your illegant custom of slapeing in your clothes. What's ye got onder the blanket?"

"The barker. It's quiet enough when there's no cause to use it. What have you to say?"

"Tell me truly now. Is Barney Crewe your rale name or your professional name?"

"'Tis my own name."

"And what age moight ye be? Moind I'm puttin' these questions for your own sake, my dear boy."

"I take it I'm about eight and twenty."

"Do you remember aither your father or your mother?"

"No."

"Now, look at me full in the face. Does your bowels yearn towards me?"

"No."

"Now doesn't an angel's voice same to whisper to ye that I'm all the kith and kin y'ever had in the wurld that's left to ye?"

"What the devil do you mean?"

"Can you rade, Barney?" asked the pedlar, bringing a snuff-box from his pocket.

"No."

"That's another proof that y' are a blessed son of St. Patrick. If you could rade you would see that the name engravin' on the back of this box, that

was presented to me by your own mother, is—Barney Crewe."

"What are you driving at?"

"Barney, you bear the same name as mine becase y'are my eldest son—by your mother. And now take yer hand from the slaughtering pistol and embrace me."

"No, thank you."

"Y'ave the cold Saxon blood in your veins—your mother's blood, and she was a cold and calculatun woman as iver drew the blessed breath of life. Ye'll break my heart with your cruelty, ye will."

The father wiped his eyes.

"Don't let's have any confounded nonsense. Here, take this piece and fetch a noggin of rum."

"Sure it's the blessed voice of my own flesh and blood that spakes that same. Will y'ave any wather to spoil the gift of Natur', darlint?"

"Oh, curse the water; the innkeeper

takes care that we shall have enough of that."

"Good again. Y'are Irish to the backbone of ye."

While the father hurried off to get the required spirit, his son renewed the priming of his pistol, set it where it could be reached at a moment, and slipping out of bed made all the toilet that was necessary to him—in a word, he pulled on his boots."

The names mentioned by the pedlar had rekindled his desire to know why Doctor Blandly made the annual payment to him and Gerard, a desire which had lately dwindled in the entire absence of any element to sustain it. He hoped to discover in the circumstances of his birth some fact which would enable him to turn the tables on Doctor Blandly, and force him to increase the sum he paid with such reluctance.

The pedlar quickly returned with the rum, but he would not spoil the pleasure of drinking it by a line of conversation which might engross their thoughts too deeply. He confined himself to general remarks until the cup was drained, then he returned to the subject which Barnabas was now eager to pursue.

"Barney, my boy, I've somethun to tell you av moighty importance. Ye must know that I've had the honour of slapein' in the same chamber wid your valet, an' a proud moment it was when I diskivered that it was my own son that kept a sarvent and horses, an' did nothin' in the wurld but ride about the counthry like a gentleman. He's a dacent sort of a boy, your valet, but ye give him too much liberty, Barney, and anywan but your own father would have persuaded him to turn King's evidence agin ye for the paltry

reward offered for the apprehension of the likes of you."

"What has he told you—confound him?"

"Nothun' at all, nothun' in the world. But be careful wid him, darlint."

"Go on."

"When I larnt your name I just descended into the fresh air and took a stroll up and down under the blessed sky of heaven till the man opened the house, and all the time I was a-thinkun', Barney, and a-thinkun' with all the power of my mind, and I said intarnally, 'There's the hand of a merciful Providence in all this, and somethin's to be made out of ut, or my name's not Barney O'Crewe.' But first and foremost, my boy, we must have no resarve, we must riv'rance the holy tie that binds us together—father and son, and kape no secrets. So before I whisper a word ye'll just understand that we're

to go halves, share and share alike in the blessed gifts that Providence may shower upon us."

"Halves; all right." Barnabas saw no objection to making promises which only his word could bind him to keep.

"I'll trust ye, Barney, I'll trust ye becase y'are my own son, and becase it'll be to your own interest to kape your word. Now, tell me true, darlint, do you know your own brother?"

"Gerard? Little enough. He's in London, living the life of a lord, and a beggarly guinea or two now and then is all I get out of him."

Barney O'Crewe reflected a moment, then—

"And that's all you know about your brother?" he said.

"That's all."

"And Doctor Blandly—what do you know of him?"

"He gives me two hundred a year, and threatens to stop it if I don't humble myself like a cur when I go and take the quarterly allowance."

"And d'ye happen to know what he pays you the money for?"

"No—that is—no."

"Don't decave me, darlint; y' hesitated. What was you about to spake?"

"I believe he pays it to me, not on his own account, but for some one else."

"Misther Talbot, the son of the Admiral?"

"Yes."

"An' you don't know what for he pays it?"

"No. I tried to find out, but the old scoundrel promised to stop payment if I ever put a word of inquiry to Mr. Talbot, and he'd do it too."

"An' you know nothin' of Misther Talbot?"

"Nothing. I'm told that he spends his time travelling in foreign parts."

"Y'ave never made an inquiry at Talbot Hall?"

"No; I'm afraid to do that for fear of Doctor Blandly."

"Barney, darlint, I'll tell ye a little story, and every word on it as true as the blessed saints."

CHAPTER XII.

A RETROSPECT.

"WHEN I was a young man, a trifle younger than you, I was a thunderin' handsome boy as ye could mate wid of a summer's day. If ye look at me a bit you'll see the traces of a foine fellow. There's a curl in my hair, my teeth are still whoite and good, and my eyes have a roguish twinkle in 'em; for the rest of my faitures, they've suffered by hard work and my sorrers. I was a dashun', dare-devil boy, with nothun' in the world but my good looks,

my impedence, and my blarney, and seein' that I was a soight too good for county Cork, I engaged myself as body sarvant to a foine gentleman going to London town. Wan night, when my masther was laid up wid a hole in his side that he'd got from another foine gentleman he'd called out in a duel, I took a holiday, and wishin' to appear like a rale gentleman, I borrowed his clothes and went out in 'em. As I was strolling along the Mall in all the majesty of man, I passed a swate widder. She was nayther young nor beautiful, but she looked prosperous, and a saucy leer in her eye seemed to whisper to my soul that she'd more property than she knew what to do wid alone. Says I to myself, 'Barney, my darlint, there's the wife that's waitun for ye.'

"I walked on a hundred yards and then turned round. She'd turned round

aqually, and when we drew nair she dropped her fan, which I picked up wid all the grace imaginable, and presented to her wid an iligant spach—which my own masther would have been proud to have spaken. Ye may be sure I didn't loose the opportunity which Providence had given me, and before I left her I had talked all I knew about hearts and darts, and Cupids and Vanuses, and perishin' and languishin', an' all what I'd heard my masther sayun in similar situations, and made an appointment to meet her the next day. She wanted me to write a letter, but I wodn't agree to ut, for writing a letter would have placed me in a moighty awkward predicament, seeing I didn't know the letter A from a bull's fut. I towld the swate cratur that my passion was too strong for writun, and I must see her and spake to her wid my eyes or parish in despair.

"That's the way you must spake to the female sex to plase 'em. Thank the powers, my masther's wound grew worse instead of better, and so I conthrived to mate the widder again and again in his foine embroidered clothes, and I made love to her just for all the world as if I maned it. And so matters went on flourishing until the masther's wound growed aisier, and he began to suspict me, and I saw that I must make my hay all of a hurry afore the storm came.

"I was not wrong in my ideas; the widder was prosperous. Her husband had left her two thousand pounds and an iligant shop in the drapery business. So as there was no time to lose, I proposed to the swate crater, and married her the very day my masther got well enough to kick me out of the house, borrowin' a suit of clothes for the occasion of a gintleman that made it his trade to buy

up old coats of the gentry's sarvints. The widder was moighty surprised when she found that I had nothun at all in the wurld but the clothes I stood in, and them not my own; but she was too much bothered with love to take a thrifle like that to heart, and before a week was over she had forgiven me everything, and was plased to let me have all that I naded, includin' a pocketfull of money. So then I was a rale gentleman, Barney, wid nothun to do but to spend the widder's money, get drunk, and make love to the gals.

"I hadn't been married more than a month when I fell dasperate in love with a charming cratur, who played the pieces with delicate sentiment at the King's Theatre in Covent Garden. Her name was Patty Davies, and I till you true, Barney, that I cried till I was ashamed of myself in sympathy with her vartue and

innocense when I saw her representin' Ophalia. I loved her the first time I saw her, and to the vorey last I loved her sincarely and hardly anyone better. I bought her jewels, I bought her fine dresses, I lavished the widder's money upon her as if it was wather.

"But, onfortunately that could not go on for ever, and wan day I had to leave the widder for ever because of a writ that was out against me for debt, which she had not the money to discharge, bad cess to her! I never see her agen."

"Then what has she got to do with my affairs?" asked Barnabas.

"Nothun, darlint."

"What on earth is the use of wasting time about her?"

"Don't be s' impatient, my boy. Sure it's plasing to you to know that your father's been a rale gentleman."

"Let me know something of the

matter that you told me was of importance."

"I'm comun to ut, Barney. Ye must know I had my roivals, and amongst 'em was a captun—a post captun in the navy, Captun Talbot, a man quite young, loike myself, but with no more knowledge of the wurld than a babe. He'd tuk to the sea as a boy and never left it except when he came home from a voyage, and so it was only raisonable that he should be innocent and simple, and tender-hearted; but he was about as strong as a lion, and just as ready to fight.

"Now, Patty was as foine an actress off the stage as she was upon ut, and when I towld her that the game was pleyed out and the bailiffs was after me, she made up at once to young Captun Talbot, and leavin' me with a laugh at one side of the stage, went round to him at t'other with her eyes full of tears and a moighty

touching story of her innocence and temptations, and the want of some lovun' soul to shield her from the bitter hardships of her lonely life. I'll tell you her motive, Barney—she expected you to come into the world before many months, and she wanted to find another father for you as could give you a home worthy of you, my boy: a name and a fortune, such as you deserved—do you take my maning?"

"I understand—go on."

"Now, Captun Talbot was a widderer. He had married three years before ever he see Patty, and his wife died in giving birth to her first and only child—a son christened Thomas."

"I know—well?"

"The son grew strong and hearty, but the father bein' forced to go a-travelling about on the seas, was oblaiged to leave him to the tender mercies of a nuss.

Patty saw the son then two year old, and cried her eyes out over him, and the Captain, touched by her delicate performance, ast her if she would be a mother to his boy, and give up the stage and all her London friends to live in the country as his wife. Patty wanted nothun better, so she lifted up her face all streamun with tears and kissed him for a reply. The scane took place in her dressing-room, where the Captain had come wid a bit of a girl carrying the babe—come so suddintly that I had only just toime to slip behind a long hooped gownd that hung in a corner.

"Well, Barney, the next day I was nabbed by the bums and put into the Fleet for a debt of four hundert pounds. It was three years before I got out, and havun' nothun' in my pocket—and nothun' in my stomach by the same token—my first thoughts were of Patty, and that

day I walked to Sevenoaks with nought but wather and crusts to eat on the way, and at night I rang the bell at the gates of Talbot Hall. It naided all the par-sevairance of my characther to obtain an interview. When I did I found Patty as white as a ghost, sitting' wid you at her feet struggling to get at the cat with your silver rattle—y' had a foine spirit on you even then, Barney, and your brother Gerard at her breast, whoile the Captain's eldest son, Thomas, was sitting in a chair by your brother's side. Patty rang the bell, and had Masther Tom taken away, case he was foive years old, and children's moighty forrard talking about what's not naided; then she says, 'Mr. O'Crewe,' she says, 'what do you want?' I towld her as I loved her sincairely, and begged her to pack up her jowels and fly wid me to a happy and blissful hoame. She refused p'int blank, and I shed tears at her

ingratitude and infidelity. She said she had done wrong, but she would make reparation by living a good life, and being a dacent mother to her husband's children. Though I loved her sincairely, I lost my temper, and I said, 'Keep your husband's children, but I'll have mine,' and with that I catched hold of you, my boy.' 'Oh, my God,' she cried, 'What are you going to do?' 'I am going to take my child away,' says I, 'and if Captun Talbot asks for him, you can send him to me for an explanation.' That brought your mother to raison. 'How much money do you want to leave me in peace with my children?' she asked. Well, my boy, I tuk a few pounds and an iligant jewel she wore at her throat to go on wid, and I forgave her wid a free heart, and left her in pace, she implorin' me not to come again, as every day she expected her husband to return. I

promised, and made up my moind to kape my word, case I should ruin the game by playin' reckless. But, onfortunately, I have, I must admit ut candidly, I have wan fault."

"Ah! drink."

"No, Barney, that is not a fault. My fault is, that when I'm dronk I lose my sober senses. Well, when, after livin' in a neighbouring tavern like a lord for a month, wan day I happened to be a little bit onder the influence of the blessed gift of natur', I tuk ut into my head that I would go up to the Hall and get a few pounds. I rang the bell, and a man came from the porter's lodge with his collar turned high up, for it was devilish rainy weather. I was almost bloind drunk, Barney, and when he asked me what I wanted, I was too busy holdin' myself up by the gate-post to look at um much, so I said, 'I want to see Patty—Mrs.

Talbot,' and I laughed. 'Do you know your way?' he asked, with devilish cunning, and I, loike a poor, simple, guileless soul, answered, 'To be sure I do; I only wish I had as many silver shilluns as I knew my way.' He opened the gate for me, and in I staggered, like a blessed lamb into the shambles. I rowled up to the house, and goun in by the sarvints' entrance, as was natral to me, I tumbled up the stairs, and bust into the room where Patty was sittun. 'Great Heavens!' cries Patty, 'leave the house at once, my husband has sent a message tellun as his ship's in port, and he will be wid me this night.' I nodded and says, 'I met the messenger at the lodge, and a decent sort of a crater he seems. Give me some money, and I'll go away at once.' She guv me a purse, but I happened to ketch the sparkle of an iligant ring on her finger, and the divil was in me to have that too. 'Dar-

lint,' I says, 'ye'll give me the jowil that twinkles broight as your beautiful eyes on your finger.' 'No,' says she; 'he guv ut me, and he'll want to know what's gone of it; ye shan't have ut,' she says. 'As you like,' says I, 'but if I can't have the ring, I'll have my own flesh and blood. I'll have my dear, swate little Thaophilus to bagin wid,' and I ketched hold of you, for Thaophilus was the name she'd guv you, my boy; but you worr a moighty onamiable chyild, and ye began to scrame thunder and blazes, when the door opened and in came the man in the long coat as ud opened the gate to me. 'Marciful powers!' scramed Patty, dropping down on the flure, 'my husband!' He'd followed me and heard all my indiscretion."

"Confound you, for a drunken old fool! 'Tis you, then, that ruined me!"

cried Barnabas, jumping up from the bedside and stamping his foot.

"Don't be cross wid your own old father, Barney. Listen, darlint, and your heart will melt wid pity for me, like a roll of buther under the gentle influince of the blessed sun . . . Widout a word of koindness the Captun screwed his knuckles into the nape of my neck, and as I drop'd you, implorun him to be marciful, he lifted me out of the room, marched me down the droive, and bundled me into the porter's lodge, guvun a word or two to the porter. I thought he maned laving me there and sendin' for a constable to take me off to the stocks for a rogue and a vagabind, and I thanked the merciful saints for protectun me in the morment of adversity; but I was mistaken, Barney, and presently received a warnun that I shan't forget till my last hour, never to thank the saints before y'are certain sure

they have done somethun to be thankful for, for sure they'll chate you if they can. Whoile the porter was absent the Captun took off his coat, and when the porter came back agen he'd a length of rope in his hand, a rope, Barney, darlint, not very thick, but as hard as nails. The Captun he doubles the rope, puts a knot in each end, and twisted the doubled length round his hand, leavun the two ends about two feet long. 'Captun, darlint,' I says, 'what are you go'n to do wid the rope?' He didn't condescend to give me a worrd in reply, but he tuk me by the collar agen, holden me just so that I couldn't move no more than if I was in a pillory, and with that awful insthrument of torture he bate me, and he bate me till my coat and breeches was in rags, and I swownded right off wid the agony and suffering, 'twas no sham swownd, for he bate me till I couldn't holler, and when

I recovered I was lyun in a ditch. Barney, darlint, I've the marks of that bating on my body now."

"I'm glad of it; serves you right."

"Y'are an onnatural choild. Where's the Irish blood I guv you?"

"Finish your story."

"Won't you guv me a drop of rum, darlint? Talkin' with a dry mouth is moighty difficult."

"You shall have a noggin when you come to the end of the tale."

"I'll be as spadey as possible then. You may rest aisey that I didn't go back to Talbot Hall in a hurry after the infliction of that thremenjous bating. I didn't go anight he place for three months, and only then beca'se I was druv to it by extrame necessity. I had nothing in the world at all, Barney, darlint, but the tatters of my garmints and the scars on my back, and when I approached the Hall it was with a

thremblin' in every blessed limb of my body and my taeth likewoise, and then I didn't go nearer than the tavern, where only a short toime before I had been a livin' like a prince. Wad ye believe it, they wouldn' sarve me with a paltry mug of ale? Instead of giving me comfort, they added to my misery by telling me that the Hall was empty—that Captun Talbot had took his wife and the childer away no one knew where. In bither disappointment I retarned to London with all my tendher feeluns, and the yearnin's of my soul ongratified. Three months more passed before by a marciful Providence I was brought face to face wid my darlint Patty. At forst she would have nothun to say to me; but I parsevered, Barney—I followed her till I found out where she lived, and then I brought the swate cratur to raison by threatenen to take my dear Barney away from her;

for I knew a dacent chimney-sweeper who was willun to purchase the likes of you for a thrifle to educate to the prafession of climbing chimnies. Then she towld me that I had ruined her. Her husband—they'd made an admiral of um, and sure if he bate his counthry's enemies as he bate his own he desarved the promotion—had taken his eldest son, Tom, that he had by his first wife away, and given her an annual income of four hunthred pounds a yaar, conditionally that she abandoned his name and rachristened your brother and you, and niver attempted to see him agen. He disowned you, which was not to be wondered at considering what had tuk place, but he likewoise disowned Gerard; for you see nothun Patty could say would make um believe that she had been true to him since her marriage. He had proofs that I visited the Hall, and I myself had un-

fortunately towld um that I knew the way parfictly well. He said that if you were my son, Gerard was moine also; though he was not, as the holy saints knows full well for the truth seein' I was in the Fleet for nigh two year before ever he saw the light of day. The money was paid to your mother, as 'tis paid to you, through Docthor Blandly. He was a young man then, and as handy with the use of a rope's-end as his friend the Admiral, so I had to be careful and kape clear of um. But still I managed to live tolerable aisey wid what I could get, which was a decent percintage on all your blessed mother had; and I had larnt to be contínted wid thrifles. I could have gone on livin' in the same manner all the rest of my days, and died a paceful old gentleman; but fortune was cruel against me. Ye caught the small-pox, Barney, darlint; but y'are

my own son, and I will not reproach ye—ye caught the small-pox bad, and for fear I might take the disase and add to the throubles of your mother, I tuk what there was in the house and left it to jine a swateheart of mine who was thravelling round the counthry wid a company of players. I was always moighty fond of the theater. When I come back I found your mother had tuk the small-pox in nussen you, and died of ut just as you recovered. 'Twas an inspiration that warned me to lave the house when I did, and ye see plainly, darlint, how the blessed saints watched over and protected us. Docther Blandly, I was towld, by the same token, had removed you and your half-brother Gerard; and there was not a rap left for me. I have never seen Gerard since, nor you till this blessed morn, and havin' finished the history so far as consarns you, if you've no abjaction we'll

take the noggun of rum you were spakun about."

"Give you a noggin!—what for? Do I owe you anything but a curse for having ruined me by your meddling and interfering with my mother after she was married?"

The old man looked at his son without the slightest malice. A smile stole over his face, and his eyes twinkled with a knowledge of his own superior cunning.

"Y'ave a swate sperit on you, Barney, darlint; but y'are a fool. Y'are loike an innocent pig that's dying to get at the meal, but hasn't the sense to ontie the string and crawl into the sack."

"Then what do you suggest?"

"I am that dry wid telling ye the truth that I couldn't spake another word widout a taste of the blessed gift o' natur."

Barnabas puzzled his dull brains in trying to see what advantage could be

derived from his recently acquired knowledge, and then reluctantly handed the pence to his father with a feeble hope that he might receive value for the money.

After a brief interval the old pedlar returned from his expedition to the bar-parlour, with a measure of rum, which the two drank, and then seeming greatly refreshed, he wiped his lips with the back of his hand briskly, and said :

"Now, Barney, where's your brother Gerard ?"

"In London."

"In London, and can you tell me where now ?"

"No," replied Barnabas with emphasis, detecting his father's eagerness to know.

"'Tis a pity. London's a large place; but faith we'll foind um if he's to be found."

"And what then ?"

"We'll make a bargain wid um before ever we tell um a word."

"Supposing he won't come to terms, and that is more than likely."

"Then we'll just do widout him. We'll foind Mr. Talbot, and you'll go to him wid a nice clean face, and say, 'Tom, I'm your brother, and my heart's a yearnin' towards ye, and I most live wid ye or die,' and if Docther Blandly says y'are not, ye'll just quoiet and aisey speaking ask him to prove that you're not."

Barnabas took some time to comprehend the full meaning of the hint, then:

"And suppose he does prove it?"

"He can't. The Admiral was ashamed of what had tuk place—Patty towld me so, and said as how it was a blot upon the fair history of the family—and for that reason he never whispered a word of it to a sowl except Docther Blandly. The Admiral's dead, and what proof agen you is the word of the ould Docther, who maybe for his own reasons is intherested in keeping you

out of the family? There y'are by law his son and Thomas Talbot's brother."

Barnabas slapped his thigh and grinned; his father encouraged by this flattering mark of appreciation, proceeded:

"He can't deny ye. Ye stand there Thaophilus Talbot. He dare not forbid ye to enter your father's house, and when y'are wance inside, my boy, ye may puzzle the devil and Docther Blandly together to get ye out."

"But suppose," Barnabas urged, biting his nail at the same time, "suppose he does forbid me to enter the house, and uses the same kind of argument his father used with you, how will that be."

"Bad for you, darlint. But y'have nothun of the koind to fear. Doubting the thing he's towld for true, he daren't lift his hand agen you, with the possibility of disgracin' his father's son. And look here now, agen, supposun and supposun all you

like, y'have still the masther hand of him. If he says ye shan't cross the threshold of Talbot Hall, nor ye shan't have a farden of his money, you'll say, 'Brother Tom, yer cruelty will force me to take to the road, and if I'm caught, it's Thaophilus Talbot will be tried, and you'll have the satisfaction of quarthering Tyburn-tree upon your scutcheon.'"

Barnabas nodded assent.

"For his father's sake, for the honour of his fam'ly, he daren't let the sacret be made public, wid no better result than saving a few pounds. No, my boy, ye'll set your fut in Talbot Hall, and ye'll never lave ut, and it's the foine feastun and drinkun we'll have there."

"We! What have you got to do with it?"

"Sure, darlint, yo' won't kick away the poor old ladder that's helped ye to mount up to the top of your fortune."

"Won't I! we shall see." Barnabas laughed, and then confident in his ability to do in future without his father, added, "You shouldn't have told me so much without first providing for yourself."

"Faith, and I've done the same, darlint," murmured the old man, with a most oily suavity in his tone.

Barnabas ceased to laugh.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Ye can't do widout me, darlint, seein' that I would claim ye for my own son if ye could demane yourself to forget me. I'm full of tender feeluns for you, and I'll naver laave ye whoile y'are tender and true to me. Couldn't I have persuaded your poor ignorant sarvint to run away wid me and turn King's evidence, and sowld ye to the constables whoile ye was slapeing so swately in your bed? Couldn't I go now to Docthor Blandly, and promise for a thrifle to go agen ye in a

court of law, if ye made yourself onplaisant? And wouldn't I if I wasn't wise enough howld on to my own blessed son while he kapes up his characther dacently?"

"You've got the cunning of old Nick," growled Barnabas.

"Thank ye, darlint, for the compliment; the same to you."

CHAPTER XIII.

PREMEDITATION.

"THERE'S your change, and there's your sturrups," said the landlord of the "Lone Crow," when Barnabas, after breakfast, signified his intention of departing. "Fair and square, and two ha'peneys for a penny's my motter, and no hitting below the belt."

At a sign from his master, Slink took the stirrups, and went away to saddle the horses, and soon after returned with them to the back-door of the inn, where

Barnabas stood beside the pedlar, who was talking with his customary volubility, but in a subdued tone.

Slink was mystified and apprehensive. As yet his master had not spoken a word, good or bad, to him, but that did not lessen the dread aroused by his finding him on intimate terms of friendship with the pedlar who had betrayed him into a confession.

While Barnabas was putting his pistols in their holsters, the pedlar, who had caught a menacing glance from Slink, came to his side and said in a low voice:

"I've been spakin' a good word wid the masther for ye, my boy. Ye'll foind that he'll trate ye wid more considtheration in futur'."

Slink's gratitude was expressed in a rapid nod, a smile, a wink, and a grip of the hand extended to him; then he fol-

lowed his master's example and sprang in the saddle.

"God bless ye, Barney, darlint," said the wily old man, going to the side of Barnabas. "'Tis a moighty foine figure ye cut astride of your horse, and I'm proud of ye. Ye'll kape an eye on the boy behint ye. Trost no man but your owld father, that loves ye so darely. In three weeks toime ye'll mate me here agen and tell me true how ye prosper. Ye know what to do in the manewhoile, and ye ondersthand that ye kin do nothun widout me. Farewell, my darlint, and 'tis a chareful time we'll have at the old Hall of your ancisthers."

Barney nodded, and touched his horse's side with his heel. The Walloper had contrived to open his gate, and launched a final motto as his guests passed out.

"Always glad to meet you, Captain,

within the rules. Fair give and take, and part friends—there you are."

Without responding to this honest sentiment, Barnabas jerked the rein, and taking the London road, trotted along in sombre meditation.

When they had gone some distance, he smacked his boot with his whip, and at the signal Slink came to his side.

"You can't learn to hold your tongue, it seems," said Barnabas.

"What have I said, master?"

"Enough to hang you. If the pedlar hadn't been a particular friend of mine you would have been in gaol by this time. You thought you could sell me, didn't you? Don't tell a lie, you would. But I shouldn't swing; it was you who stole this horse, and sold it to me for the one you are on. You may be thankful for your escape. I'm too kind to you, that's

the fact. You will sleep in the same room with me in future."

"I wish I had never been born!" whimpered Slink, "my life's a misery to me. Here, master, take my horse, and everything I have, and let me go free as I was the day you met me first."

"Oh, no, I've not done with you yet. Look here," tapping a holster, "if you attempt to leave me, you know what will happen."

This threat, which at one time had made Slink tremble with fear, seemed to make but little impression on him now: it had been repeated often, and his fear of death was diminished greatly by the wretchedness of living.

"It's all for your own good," continued Barnabas; "haven't I made a man of you? At one time you used to blubber like a big girl at the sight of a pistol, and feared every man you came near for a constable;

no wonder your sweetheart would have nothing to say to you. A woman wants a man for her husband, and I'll warrant when you go to your wench with a dare-devil look on your face, she'll be civiler to you than ever she's been before."

"Do you think so, master?"

"Of course I do. Besides, I shall put a lot of money into your pocket before long, and what maid would say no to you then? You do all I bid you, and before a month's out you'll be as rich as a lord and as free as the wind."

"Does your honour mean it?"

"I'll take my oath on it. But mind—you must do whatever you're told to do without hesitation—and you must help me."

"You don't want me to—to—"

"No, I don't. The work I've got for you to do is as innocent as singing hymns."

" Your honour won't find me backward at doing anything of that sort; I'm wonderful fond of singing. Master Twist the music-man, told parson I'd the best voice in the parish, so parson said, 'Let's have 'n in the choir, for the music hasn't pleased me for a long while.' So Master Twist, he put I in the choir, and Monday morning he ax'd parson whether he's zatisfied. 'No,' says the parson, ''t ain't right now; but I've found out what's the matter—there's too much music; take away the big fiddle. So Master Twist took the big fiddle away, and nex' Monday he ax'd parson agen if he wurr zatisfied. 'No,' says parson, 'there's too much now; you must take half they b'ys away.' So Master Twist took six of the b'ys away, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd parson if he wurr zatisfied now. 'No,' says parson; 'it's the gals that makes the noise—take them away.'

So Master Twist took the gals away, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd if he wurr zatisfied. 'No,' says parson, 'there's too many b'ys.' So Master Twist took all the other b'ys away, and there was only me and him with the flute left, and nex' Monday morning he ax'd parson if he wurr zatisfied, just the same as before. 'It's better,' says parson, 'and it would be better still if the choir was up in the belfry.'"

"Have you done?" asked Barnabas.

Slinked looked at his master's scowling face, and conscious of the indiscretion into which he had been led by that first faint glimpse of amiability on the part of his master, blushed up to the eyes and nodded his head.

"In that case you can hold your noise until you're asked to speak again."

Slink smothered a sigh and dropped in

the rear, with his head bent in conscious disgrace.

Left to his own reflections, Barnabas turned over in his mind all that he had heard from his father, and the suggestions he had made, which were pleasant, as offering the prospect of gain to himself, but unpalateable in other respects. The greedy, dull scoundrel wanted all for himself, and was unwilling that anyone should share with him the ill-gotten profit.

"What has my father done that he should have a penny from Talbot?" his thoughts ran. "He has done me an injury in reducing me to my present position by his drunken folly. I'm not the blind fool he takes me to be. I see clearly enough that he would have me under his thumb, as he had my mother, if I gave him the chance. By threatening to blow on me he would extort all that I get, and likely enough in another drunken fit

he would blab the truth, and ruin me as he ruined my mother. Then what would happen?

"I should be kicked out and the payment made by Doctor Blandly stopped as a reward for my pains. I won't trust my father if I can help it; but how can I do without him, or in opposition to him. He has only to show himself to the Doctor and tell him all to upset me. To spite me and get a bottle of rum he would do anything. . . .

"He says that my birth was concealed for a couple of months before it was registered in the parish books, in order to avoid Admiral Talbot's suspicions. That registry would establish my claims against all that Doctor Blandly could say; but suppose the Admiral, to conceal what he called his disgrace, had the passage scratched out. No, he couldn't do that. I suppose I

could see the register and make sure. But that would be nothing if Doctor Blandly and my father combined to undo me. I may have to buy him over to my side after all.

"But then Gerard will have an equal right, curse him. That makes three of us to divide what Talbot chooses to allow us, which may be little enough after all. Board and lodging, perhaps, and no more. A fine treat that. I can make no legal claim upon this Talbot, and if he doesn't like my ways he may just start me off about my business, and I should have no redress. If the Admiral made a will and left the property to his son Thomas, it's his, and no one can take it from him. At the best I shall be dependent on his generosity, and have to truckle and bend before him like a servant, while Gerard with his dainty face and white hands, and 'haw, haw' here, and

'ha, ha' there, will be his favourite, and get all the good that is to be got. A fine peace of justice truly, when I shall have to manage father and supply him with what he demands. Yes, Gerard will take the cream, while I must share the whey with the old man. The dirty work and no reward worth having! Plague take me, a fine bargain that is! Better to put up with a couple of hundred a year and be free; I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that Gerard gets no more, and disappoint the old man with all his cunning. . . .

"But I can't let the prize lay there and not make a grab for it. There's a way to get it if one only knew how. I'll be bound my father could put me up to the means if it were not to his own disadvantage. There must be some way of doing it. One needn't cut down an apple tree to get at the fruit. How can it be

done. If I had only my father's brains instead of his blood I'd be better contented. If I found Mr. Talbot, and feigned to be prodigiously honest, told him all and threw myself upon his generosity, I should be likely to get more than by my father's scheme, besides shutting him out from any advantage. But then Gerard would come in and get ten times as much as I should. I don't like that scheme. It doesn't release me from the dependency upon Talbot. . . .

"I wonder where he is. The other end of the world perhaps — dead for all I know. How would that be if he were ——"

He reined in his horse suddenly for no obvious reason, and halted in the middle of the road.

"Do you want me, master?" asked Slink, coming to his side.

"No, and be hanged to you. Keep

behind," answered Barnabas, touching his horse angrily, and then curbing it up with savage ferocity to a walking pace.

He continued the journey for some time at that pace, while he considered what his position might be if Tom Talbot were dead.

CHAPTER XIV.

ROUSING THE LION.

IT was the 25th of June, and the object of Barnabas Crewe's present journey to Edmonton was, as may be imagined, to receive the quarterly allowance from Doctor Blandly. He put himself upon his best behaviour, and took the fifty pounds in agreeable silence, and without testing the quality of each piece by the process of ringing on the table or biting between his teeth, as had hitherto been his custom. When he rejoined Slink at "The Bell," he called for a modest quart

of ale, and shared it fairly with his servant, which was an exceptional act of generosity, and a wholesome departure from his usual habit of debauching himself by the speediest means to be procured. After paying for the ale he counted his money, and buttoned it up carefully in his pocket as he left the inn.

"Slink," said he, when they were once more on the road, "which road do you know to Sevenoaks?"

Slink looked at his master in open-mouthed astonishment.

"Well, fool?" asked Barnabas.

"I don't know my way from London, master."

"Where do you know your way from, then?"

"From Maidstone, or Chizzelhurst, or Bromley."

"Do you know your way from Gravesend?"

"Yes, by Wrotam and Ightham."

"Wrotam I know; where's Ightham?"

"A few miles furder on, and about seven from Sevenoaks."

"Savage kind of place thereabouts, isn't it?"

"A village, your honour; not very savage, two inns."

"Any houses between there and Sevenoaks?"

"A few, not many, master. There's Knole Park."

"Ah, Knole; that lies between Ightham and Talbot Hall?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Then now for Gravesend. . . . . What are you blubbering about?"

"You're not going nigh Talbot Hall, are you, master?"

"Yes. Is there anything terrible in that?"

"We shall be lost, that's all. Hanged,

nothing more. Master Blake, the steward, knows your horse as well as I do."

"Hum! that might get me into trouble. I must manage to exchange him on the road."

"But Master Blake knows me just as well as the horse."

"Then you'll have to keep a smart look-out. Fall back."

They had passed Dartford before Barnabas made any sign of wishing to renew the conversation, then he made the usual signal, and Slink came to his side, touching his hat, but looking straight before him with heavy eyes and a woe-begone expression on his face. Barnabas, after looking at him for a minute in mute disgust, said:

"What a blameful, hang-dog looking hound you are."

"I can't help it, master."

"Sit straight in your saddle, hold your head up, now look as if your life depended on your pluck, fancy you have Tyburn in front of you, and a batch of snap-jacks at your heels."

Slink turned sharply and looked behind him, with a falling lip and chattering teeth.

"Bah! you make a man ill to look at you!"

Barnabas gave a cut at Slink's horse with his whip, causing the animal to make such a bound as nearly unseated the rider. Slink had no fear of horses, and showed considerable spirit in subduing the restive beast.

"Ah! now you look like a man. I hate your sneaking, snivelling faces, and so do women. When we come upon a barber's you'll have that shock of hair trimmed up smart, and if there's e'er a haberdasher's in Gravesend you'll buy

yourself a pair of riding-gloves and a jaunty cravat; I suppose you ought to have a new pair of boots. Well, there's a piece of gold for you, and to-morrow morning let me see you as spruce as a carrot, with your hat cocked on your ear, your chin up, a flower-bud or a straw in your mouth, and a devil-may-care carriage. D'ye hear?"

"Better tell me again, master," said Slink, not sure whether he had heard correctly.

Barnabas repeated his instructions, and Slink, with undiminished amazement, asked:

"What's all that for, master?"

"I want you to see that sweetheart of yours, and what is more, I want her to see you."

"But, your honour, if——"

"Speak when you're told to speak. To-morrow we shall push on to the village

you spoke of; there I shall stop while you go on to Talbot Hall. Curse that face! look the other way, if you can't show me a better. You'll go to Talbot Hall—a-foot if you like—and hang about until you have a chance of seeing your sweetheart alone. Then you'll put on the air of a man, and I warrant she'll listen to you. You shall buy her a shawl or brooch at Gravesend and give it to her, and while you're making love you'll just find out in what part of the world Mr. Talbot is travelling, and you won't leave her until, by fair means or foul, you've found out. Don't face her with a blush and a sickening simper; stick out your lip, strut up to her like a cockerel, chuck her under the chin, and laugh at her if she puts on her fine airs. I wager a crown to a penny she'll part from you with a sigh, and never rest till she sees you again."

Slink's face expanded into a broad grin

of satisfaction; and as his imagination dwelt upon the part he was to play, he gave his hat a shake, tilting it on one side, stuck out his chin and his nether lip, and assumed a rakish air, which was ludicrous enough in conjunction with his soiled and tattered neck-cloth and his red hair, which stuck out in a fluffy thicket three parts round his head.

"That's it," said Barnabas, encouragingly, "look like that and you'll carry the heart of any woman, when you're trimmed up a bit. You don't lack courage!"

"Not I," responded Slink, "I'm bold enough, if I can only get the fears out of my head."

"That's the way, man! To-morrow you won't be the same fellow your sweetheart sent about his business."

"You're right, master. I've been thinking over what you said yesterday, and I made up my mind to be more of a

man next time I face Jenny. She shall see what sort of a lover she has to deal with now, if I can only catch her alone. I shan't be afraid if I can go on foot, because I needn't stick to the roads when I see anyone coming, and can skip off behind a hedge if I hear a sound."

CHAPTER XV.

SWEETHEARTS.

PRIMED with instructions, Slink left his master at Ightham, and took the road to Sevenoaks in high spirits. He had carried out his master's instructions to the letter, and with a clean face, a new neck-cloth, a pair of sound boots, well brushed coat and breeches, gloves, and a head reduced in its contour to natural proportions by a removal of the superfluous hair and a generous application of grease to the remainder, he looked as decent a young

countryman as one would wish to see. In addition there was a certain rakishness in his air and carriage which was not usually to be seen in countrymen. His hat was cocked, a rose dangled from his lips, he flourished his riding-whip right and left, and he marched with a careless freedom, which proved that he, like other actors, felt himself for the moment to be the character he was called upon to assume.

This impudent exterior he maintained for at least a couple of miles, for the encouraging flattery of Barnabas was fresh in his mind, his spirits were invigorated by the exercise of walking and the pleasure of escaping from his master's society, and as yet he had not met a soul on the road. At Crown Point, however, the sudden apparition of a yeoman with a cudgel in his hand recalled him to the dangers of his position, and caused him

to plunge precipitately into the woods, albeit the yeoman was unknown to him, and five good miles of wild country lay between him and Talbot Hall.

He took a widely circuitous route, and when he at length drew near the Hall, it was with the stealth of a fox and the timidity of a hare combined. It was only by thinking strenuously of his master's horse-pistols that he overcame the inclination to give up the perilous undertaking. Little by little he approached, and came within a hundred yards of the lodge gates. Peering through the brambles by the roadside he could see the gate, and the lodge with its bright mullioned windows and the white curtains tied with blue ribbon. He fancied he saw Jenny herself moving within the room. He heard the sound of wheels coming down the drive, and crouched closer, then the click of the gate-latch, and bending forward, yet prepared

to dash into the woods behind him if necessary, he saw Blake, the steward, in his light cart, come into the road and turn towards Sevenoaks. Slink recollected that it was market-day.

As the cart drove off, a young woman stepped into the road and looked after it. She was a shapely young woman of twenty or thereabouts, with dark hair and eyes, and a complexion as brown as a berry; had it been a few shades darker one would have thought her a gipsy, her eyes and teeth lacked nothing of the perfection of a gipsy's. She wore a white cap, and a print dress short enough to escape her heels when she walked, and show the neat turn of her ankles; her sleeves were rolled up over her fine arms, which she stuck akimbo, resting her hands on her hips as she stood in the middle of the road, looking now to the left, now to the right.

"Jenny," murmured Slink, with a sigh. He was too far away to see the expression of her face. It seemed to him that she must be thinking of him—that perhaps she was sighing for him to return to her—that she would listen to his entreaty if he went humbly to her side and asked for forgiveness now. Whom could she expect, whom could she be hoping to see in the road if not him?

She dropped her hands and took up the corner of her apron, looking pensively up the road, with her head a little inclined to one side.

"If she's going to cry that settles it," said Slink, taking his hat in his hand.

But Jenny carried the corner of her apron no higher than her white teeth, and while Slink was still hesitating, in doubt whether to take the action as a sign of sentiment or indifference, her thoughtful

mood gave place to another, and she returned with a brisk step to the lodge, singing a snatch of a lively song.

"Singing!—a heartless baggage," said Slink. "And the very tune she knows I don't like. Well, if that's all she cares for me I won't ask her to forgive me. I'll just do as his honour bid me. She shall see that I can be as careless as she is. I am not the fool I was. I'll warrant she'll be less independant when she finds what sort of a man she has to deal with now. If she thinks I'm afraid she is mistaken. Master Blake won't be back for two hours, and no one calls at the lodge on market day."

With these thoughts Slink cocked his hat carefully, fished out the rose which he had put in his pocket for safety, and having stuck it between his teeth, and assured himself that he had forgotten nothing of the part he was to play, he

made a step towards the road, then he stopped, coughed, scratched his ear, and looked nervously towards the lodge.

Jenny had opened the window and was looking out. He determined to wait until she withdrew. He didn't wish her to see him come out of the wood, and he didn't wish to march up to the lodge under the fire of her eyes. He preferred coming upon her from behind, and taking her unprepared.

Jenny left the window to his regret; the respite had just given his spark of courage time to die out, and he found it more difficult than ever to leave the safe shelter of the wood. But once more he fixed his mind on Barnabas and his pistols, and with desperate resolution made a step forward and emerged from his cover. Now he was fairly in the road and facing the lodge, retreat was impossible. He

dared not look at the window, it was as much as he could do to keep the stem of the rose between his teeth, his heart beat with suffocating force, his hands grew wet, and his knees shook under him as he advanced.

"Pistols, pistols, pistols," he murmured as he drew near the lodge. He heard the clatter of plates, and above it the voice of Jenny singing the song he objected to. The sounds strengthened him, and came just at the right moment, for he was close by the gates, and he concluded that if he were lucky he might find her in the kitchen, where the clattering of plates and dishes showed she was engaged. He passed the gate, lifted the latch of the door, and entered the lodge at the moment Jenny was coming from the little adjoining kitchen.

Without a word or a moment's hesitation he marched up to her, and before she

could recognise his features, for he took care to present that side of his face over which his hat was cocked, he had chucked her under the chin. Jenny's response was no less sudden and unexpected—with a swing of her right arm she fetched him such a slap on the face that the rose was shot out of his mouth, his hat flew to the other end of the room, and he with difficulty kept his feet, for the room appeared to spin round him, and a thousand windows danced before his eyes.

"Why, 'tis Toby!" exclaimed Jenny, clapping her hands in astonishment.

"Slink, if you please," he answered with dignity, as he smoothed his ruffled hair, and crossed the room to pick up his hat and his rose.

"Slink, if you choose," retorted Jenny with asperity, checking the laughter that had risen to her lips. "'Tis a proper name for a man who can sneak away with

his master's horse, and without bidding good-bye to anyone."

"No one seemed to care whether I said good-bye or not, or what became of me; and as for the horse, my master told me I had as much right to it as the coat on my back."

"A pretty master, indeed. Father said you had fallen into the hands of a rogue."

"He's not more to blame than you, Jenny. It was you that drove me away—that made me so wretched. I didn't know what I was doing, and I didn't care, and if anything happens to me my blood will be upon your head."

"Oh, Toby."

"Yes, it's true enough, and you know it. The guilt rests upon you. You're like the young woman in the printed ballad I gave you last Maidstone Fair, who led her sweetheart to rob and murder

his uncle all for love, and if—if one day I'm hanged at Tyburn,"—he stopped to shudder—"you'll read your own name in my dying speech and confession, and ——"

"Oh, don't, Toby," cried Jenny, struck with horror at the picture presented to her imagination.

"And that's not all," continued Slink, pursuing the advantage he saw he had gained; "I shall walk, I know I shall. You'll hear my chains rattle in the night, and see me passing along in my sheet, just like the ghost in Otford Churchyard."

Jenny covered her head with her apron, as if to shut out the horrible vision.

"I'm a desperate, reckless man. Ah, if you only knew all!"

"You're not a murderer, Toby, are you?"

"Not yet."

"Nor a—a—thief?"

"No; but I won't answer for what may happen. I'm going the road to ruin fast. I don't go to bed at eight o'clock now. I gamble—I play cards night after night for money. I can't sleep, and sometimes I sit up half the night drinking spirits and singing songs, and listening to stories that are not fit for girls. Look at me! I'm not what I was—a simple, innocent countryman. Look at me!"

Jenny removed her apron and looked at him timidly. His hat was again cocked, and the rose, somewhat the worse for rough usage, hung limp from the corner of his mouth. He stood with his legs astride, one hand on his hips, and a defiant expression on his face.

"No, you're not what you were," Jenny said, shaking her head gravely; and something in her tone suggested to

Slink's mind that she was not displeased with the change in his appearance.

He paused a minute to consider how he was to pursue his victory, for a merely temporary victory is sometimes more fatal in its results than a repulse — then dropping his voice to a tender tone, he said:

"You haven't altered, Jenny; you're just as pretty as ever."

"You've seen finer ladies than I am, I daresay," said she, blushing.

"Oh, yes, hundreds—every day, but none that could make me forget you."

Jenny raised her eyes and smiled, making it difficult for Slink to keep up the line of attack which had gained him such an advantage. However, he overcame the temptation to be ingenuous and tender, and continued:

"No, you have not altered at all; you're pretty, but heartless."

"Oh, Toby! how can you say that?"

"Is it not the truth? Have you lost a single pound since I have been away? Look at your cheeks, and your arms as plump and beautiful as if you'd never had a day's sorrow in your life. It was nothing to you that you had driven a faithful lover to ruin! If I had been dead it would have been all the same to you, you would have still kept plump and pretty."

"I can't help it, Toby. I didn't eat anything for a whole day after you went away, but the next morning my appetite was too strong for me. Still I have thought of you, I have."

"Have you, Jenny?"

"Yes, nights and days, I have; and I've said prayers for you."

"Real true, Jenny?"

"Yes, real true. I went out in the road this very afternoon, and thought to

myself as I looked up the road, 'Oh, if I could only see Toby coming along!'"

"But you were singing a song when I came in."

"I was obliged to, to prevent myself crying."

"But it was 'Jack Robinson,' Jenny, and you know I never liked to hear you sing that."

"How could I know what I was singing, when I was thinking all the time of you?" Jenny put her apron to her eyes, and whimpering, continued: "'Tis you that are cruel and forgetful, or you would have come back to see whether I was in distress; and if you loved me truly, for my sake you wouldn't have done wrong, and gone seeing fine ladies, and gambling, and drinking, and singing songs that you wouldn't like me to hear. And you might have known that I laughed at you only to teaze you; a girl doesn't teaze anyone

that she dislikes. And then you were such a simple fellow, one was forced to laugh at you sometimes—not as you are now, with your smart gloves, and your hair cut like a gentleman's. No, don't take my hand, you're a wicked man now. I daresay you thought, when you came in with your impudent manner and touched me under the chin, that you could take liberties with me now you're a fine gentleman and I'm only a poor girl; but you've made a mistake. I will always be a good girl, and you may go away and leave me, to die all alone and unhappy, and never sing or laugh again, and oh! oh! oh!——"

The sentence was finished in broken sobs and exclamations.

"Don't cry, Jenny dear; don't ee, there's a sweet girl. I'm not so very wicked."

"Oh, yes you are. You've been listening to fine ladies and forgetting me."

"Forgetting you, Jenny! Think of the risk I run in coming to you now. If your father caught me I should be hanged for that mistake about the horse."

"No, no, you wouldn't. Father said he should let you off with a thrashing, for he knew you had done wrong only because you were so silly as not to know better. But it's fortunate you didn't come half-an-hour ago."

"Fortunate for your father, Jenny. I can defend myself, I'm not afraid. Not that I should like to injure a hair of his head, for he is your father. Oh, let him come, I am not afraid."

"He won't return for two hours, he's gone to market."

"I know that—that is—but why should we talk of him? it is you that I have come to see."

"Did you come on purpose?"

"Yes. I came to bring you this token.

It should have been better, but I am poor; for I am not lucky at cards."

"Oh, what a sweet brooch! and earrings too to match, how lovely! Coral hearts and silver arrows, how beautiful! But—but—I think I musn't take them."

"Why not, Jenny?"

"I wouldn't like to wear them if they weren't—weren't honestly come by."

"Oh, they were bought and paid for honestly, I swear."

"But if you won the money at gambling, or if the money was given you by —by the fine ladies ——"

Slink paused a minute, and then looking at Jenny, with the tears standing in his eyes, he held out his hand and said:

"Give 'em me back, Jenny. You shan't wear 'em, dear, for the money that bought 'em was given me by my master for the purpose, and the gift's none of my own, and unworthy for you to wear. I

won't deceive you, Jenny; I'll win you by fair means or not at all." He threw the trinkets on the ground, and crushed them under his feet in a fury. "I will tell you the whole truth, and why I'm here, and all that I have done and suffered through my own first folly. I will conceal nothing. You ——"

At this moment Jenny's hand was clapped upon his mouth, and she whispered hurriedly,

"Here is Mr. Talbot. Not a word, or you are lost. Quick! into the kitchen, quick!"

As may be imagined, Slink did not require pressing; he shot into the kitchen like a mouse before a cat.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESCAPE.

"GIVE me a mug of ale, Jenny," said Tom Talbot, entering the lodge. "I am too idle to go up to the house, or the path is too long, one or the other. Ah, child, what is the matter with you? Your lips are almost white, and—surely you have been weeping?"

"No, Sir, nothing ails me. Maybe the mid-day heat tries me. I will get you the ale at once, Sir."

Jenny placed a chair for Tom Talbot

quickly, and hurried into the kitchen, closing the door behind her.

"Jenny, love," whispered Slink, "if it will save you from getting into trouble I will give myself up to the young master at once, though I hang for it."

Jenny shook her head, and gave him her hand while she stooped to draw the ale. He pressed it to his lips and turned his eyes to the door alternately.

"Say the word, and for your sake I'll be brave," he whispered, as she rose from the ground.

She answered by a shake of the head, and with a smile of encouragement and a squeeze of the hand she left him. It was only womanly on her part to face a danger with gladness for a man in peril.

When she re-entered the room she found Tom Talbot seated, with a much crushed rose in one hand and the frag-

ments of a brooch in the other, which he was looking at with curiosity.

"What does this mean, Jenny?" he asked; "here are the ruins of trinkets which could not have been so desperately crushed by accident."

Jenny set the mug on the table beside Tom, and said—

"No, Sir; 'twas not an accident."

"Weren't they pretty enough for you, Jenny?"

"Oh! they were lovely; coral hearts with arrows through them—so sweet." Jenny turned to the chimney, to dust the ornaments upon it, while Tom, looking at the fragments, said to himself:

"Even here one loves and suffers. Is there no corner in the world where one may live heart-whole and in peace?" The girl kept her back to him.

"Jenny, you who are so fond of ornaments—must have had a strong reason to make

you break this offering—for they were an offering, I suppose ?"

"They were a token from my sweetheart, that is— —" she paused.

"That is—from him who was your sweetheart. Your father has told me about that early love. They were a present from Toby Slink, I suppose ?"

"Yes," sighed Jenny.

"You did right to crush them. You are worth a good husband, one a thousand times better than that sneaking thief. Crush the thoughts of him as you have crushed his gift, and open your heart to one of the decent lads in the town."

"Toby was not so bad as you think, Sir. I treated him most ill, that's why he ran away."

"And that is why he stole a horse at the same time, hey ? Don't deceive yourself, Jenny, and above all, don't let him

deceive you. If I catch him hanging about here he shall repent his rashness."

"You wouldn't have him hanged, would you, Sir?"

"No, perhaps not. The penalty of the law is greater than the offence; but I would certainly whip him within an inch of his life. I suppose he sent you these trifles by a friend?"

"He brought them himself."

"Hum! He has more courage than I should give such a fellow credit for. But perhaps he watched your father out of sight, and did not know that I was about. When was he here?"

"A—a—a—he was here a quarter of an hour ago."

"Only a quarter of an hour?" Tom cried, starting up.

"What are you going to do, Mr. Talbot, you won't hurt him?"

"Jenny, my child, 'tis but too clear

that you still care for this rascal, despite your better judgment. He has come once, he will come again, unless he has such a lesson as will stay in his memory. Your anxiety tells me that you still like him, and if I can see that, will not he? and seeing your weakness, will he not take advantage of it to your life-long misery? I promise you I will not give him up to justice, but——"

"Mr. Talbot! Mr. Talbot! what are you going to do?"

"I am going up to the house for my hound and a whip, Jenny."

As Tom strode off to the Hall, Jenny opened the door and cried to Slink:

"Quick! quick, Toby, out of the open window here. He cannot see you from the drive."

"I'll go outside, Jenny, and wait for him. I will take my whipping without crying out, if I can, and show him that

I'm not such a sneaking rascal as he takes me to be. I'd have come out while he was here, but for fear of putting you to the blush, dear. Let him beat me."

"No, no. Toby, if you do really love me, save yourself. The woods are open, and you have a start. You can't love me, Toby, or you wouldn't linger."

"You don't believe all he has said against me?"

"No; should I love you if I did?"

"And you won't open your heart to no decent lad as he was recommending?"

"No. Don't stay! Listen, Toby; *I won't marry a man who's been thrashed!* now will you save yourself?"

"Give us a kiss, Jenny, to show we're right down earnest and true."

She threw her arms round his neck and gave him a hearty kiss, lip to lip, and the next moment, invigorated and with a strength born of his new manhood, Slink

scrambled through the window and dashed off into the woods. He had not a moment to spare; already he heard the hound welcoming his master's approach to the stable.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN AFTERNOON'S WORK.

THE time hung heavily on Barnabas Crewe in Slink's absence. Strolling into the meadow behind the inn in search of amusement, he found there only a sleepy cat stretched in the sun, and a cow chewing the cud under a hedge. He threw the cat in the horse-pond, and stoned the cow until he heard someone approaching, when he turned into the skittle-alley where three or four louts were playing. He sat down and watched

the game in the hopes of finding some method of cheating, which would justify him in joining the players and compensate for his want of skill; failing to succeed in his endeavour, he left the alley in disgust, and seated himself with a pot and a pipe in the tap-room.

There he drank, smoked, and dosed by turns, until he felt hungry enough to eat some bread and cheese. After that he dosed again, until the flies irritated him into activity; then he went into the meadow to see if he could find the cat, or anything else that might afford him diversion. But the cat was now basking on the roof of a barn, and blinked at him with exasperating indifference, and the cow was browsing in a part of the field where she could not be stoned without risk of observation, so with a curse he lounged into the stable where he stood with his hands in his pockets, looking at the horses for a time.

Why should not he go up the road with the chance of meeting Slink? He called the stable lad and ordered him to saddle the grey mare, which he had exchanged at Gravesend for the horse taken by Slink, and while his bidding was being done he fetched his pistols from the house and put them in their holsters. Then he mounted, and walked his horse up the hill that overlooks the weald, keeping his eyes on the wood before him.

He was close to Crown Point, when Slink burst through the scrub by the woodside, and came running up to him breathless.

"Run, your honour, run," he gasped. "He's at my heels—he's after me."

"He—who?"

"Master Tummus."

"Talbot?"

"Yes, run, for heaven's sake, master, run."

"Don't be a fool, tell me what has happened. I shan't stir till you do."

"I was along with Jenny when he passed the window. I hid in the kitchen, and while I was there he came into t'other room, and obliged Jenny to tell him I had been there, and as he went up to the Hall to find a whip and his hound, I escaped by the window. He's following me now with the hound."

Barnabas smacked his hip with his whip and grinned.

"Shall I go on, master?" asked Slink.

"No. What do you fear?"

"The hound, your honour—and Master Tom."

"Afraid of a dog! What's the handle of your whip for; if Mr. Talbot tries to hit you, can't you defend yourself?"

"No, your honour. I'll do him no

harm, nor his dog neither. I've made up my mind—if he catches me I'll make a clean breast of it, and let him hang me or do what he will after."

"The deuce you will. Do you know that you might get me into trouble?"

"Can't help that, master. You'd best let me get off while I can."

"Wait—the hound will follow you to Ightham. That won't do. We shall have a dozen constables at our heels before night. Do you mean what you said just now?"

"I do, and nothing else. Ah, you may do your worst with them," he alluded to the pistols which Barnabas tapped significantly, "I'm reg'lar desperate."

"What do you mean? I'm trying my best to save you. Is there another inn nearer than Ightham?"

"Yes—at the foot of the hill—the 'Sir Jeffrey Amhurst.'"

"Then we must go back on our footsteps."

"But that's straight towards danger—towards Master Tom and his dog."

"So much the better. Go on in front, and when you catch sight of the inn stop. If you don't go I'll stop your tongue for ever."

Choosing the lesser evil, Slink turned and quickly ran up the hill, which, despite the opposition of Barnabas he had been descending as he recounted what had happened, reached the cross-roads, and ran down the road towards Sevenoaks, until he came to a bend, whence he could see the "Sir Jeffrey."

Barnabas, who had followed close on his heels, with his eye on the alert and his right hand in the opened holster, pulled up and dismounted.

"Jump up," he cried, taking the pistol from its holster and slipping it into his

capacious pocket. "You don't want twice telling for that. Now then, off you go to the inn at Ightham, and wait there for me. You're safe. The scent's broken."

Without a moment's hesitation, Slink, who had sprung into the saddle, dug his heels into the grey mare's sides, and using his whip without stint, galloped off in the direction of Ightham.

Barnabas walked down to the "Sir Jeffrey" and waited.

Half an hour later, Tom, following his hound, emerged from the wood at Crown Point.

With his muzzle to the ground, the hound ran down the hill towards Ightham for a hundred yards, then stopped, diverged to the right, to the left, ran on for half a dozen yards, and returned whining to the spot from which he had diverged.

"Good dog, good Dido—follow up," said Tom, patting her encouragingly.

Dido licked his hand, cried, and with her muzzle down again ran off to the left, pushing through the unbroken brake.

Tom waited in the road; presently Dido came from the wood higher up, took up the old scent with a bark of satisfaction, and ran down to where Tom stood, then finding herself again at fault, she ran down the bank to the right, and after some minutes returned, and looking up, whimpered as if for assistance.

"He has feared to go on to the village, and doubled," said Tom, as he retraced his steps towards the crest of the hill. Dido was again upon the scent, but instead of following it into the wood from which they had come, she ran along the road and descended the hill towards Sevenoaks, but within sight of the "Sir Jeffrey Amhurst" she came to a stand, and appeared again at fault. This puzzled Tom.

"He must have heard the dog and

doubled to delay pursuit," thought he, after some reflection. "A convincing proof that he's no simpleton. 'Tis not unlikely that he got back in the wood, and was perched upon one of the trees we passed under. He shan't have the gratification of seeing us go back, we will return by the road. Come, Dido," he called to the hound, who was still searching for the lost scent, "come; he has given us an afternoon's amusement, and we will let him rest, and rest ourselves for a time."

He followed the road to the "Sir Jeffrey," and sitting on the settle in the porch, called for ale.

"Have you seen a young countryman pass here this afternoon?" he asked of the woman who served him.

"No, master, nobody's been nigh this afternoon save a gent, and he ain't a countryman for certain; he's in the tap now."

To satisfy himself that the "gent" was not Slink disguised, Tom walked into the tap-room, where he looked at Barnabas, who was feeding Dido with scraps from the bread and cheese before him.

"Not much of the gent, and still less of the countryman in his composition," said Tom to himself.

"Looking for a young countryman?" asked Barnabas.

"Yes—have you seen anyone looking as though he were pursued?"

"No. That's just what I'm looking for myself. I've a warrant in my pocket for a young fellow named Slink."

"The very man I'm after. He was my servant—my name is Talbot."

This is exactly what Barnabas wished to be certain about. He looked carefully at Tom, and then with a grunt said:

"You'll be lucky if you catch him. He's a downy one, is Toby Slink."

Tom nodded and withdrew, whistling to his hound. But Dido found the bread and cheese seductive and lingered by Barnabas, whose appearance was less repulsive to her than to Tom.

Tom rested awhile, then he paid for his ale and left the "Sir Jeffrey." The sun was declining, and the great oaks threw an agreeable shade over the margin of turf by the roadside; the time and place induced meditation, and Tom walked onwards at a leisurely pace, with his hands crossed behind him, thinking no more of Slink, but as may be imagined, of Lady Betty.

"After all," he thought, "why should she not laugh and be gay. If she valued my life at all she would be pleased to hear that I had escaped from the duel. That she would learn from Gerard, who I warrant was not too modest to furnish all particulars. Perhaps those par-

ticulars excited her mirth. For a truth, I cut a mighty ridiculous figure, digging and plunging at an adversary who contented himself with parrying my thrusts, and who was too magnanimous to take advantage of my inferiority. 'Tis human weakness that serves as the food for mirth. The world sympathises with the fortunate, and laughs at the unlucky, from Quixote to the puppets in a Punch-show, and the more the poor fools are beat the more the crowd laughs. One may laugh and not be heartless, those who are readiest to smile are readiest to weep. Had I fallen, Lady Betty would have shed a tear for me: I did not fall, and so she laughed. Why should I wish it otherwise? Would I have her wretched rather than merry? It seems so, for I have done more to torment her in the last six months than to make her happy. Could I ever have made her happy? It seems

to me as I walk here in the sweet fresh air, with Nature's unblemished handiwork on every side, that nothing is wanting to perfect my happiness, but one truly loving soul to share in these delights. She might feel as I do. But the summer goes, and we could not live for ever in seclusion. Perhaps for one day of happiness there might be a hundred of misery. What is worse than to be doubted? Nothing—unless it be—to doubt."

Dido came bustling through the brushwood to his side, and jumped up at his side as if in apology for her absence. Tom mechanically dropped his hand and caressed her, and while Dido, satisfied that her inconstancy was not resented, ran off again into the wood from which she had come, he replaced his hands behind him and continued his reflection.

"It is odd that a man, with every inducement to succeed, cannot contrive to

subdue his rebellious nature. But for my jealousy I might win the girl I love; but a fool loving her with not a tithe of my affection, stands a better chance than I do. Will time alter my temper? and will she be free to woo when I may woo her well?"

His thoughts were still in this dreary train, when they were suddenly arrested by a howl from the wood on his right hand. The howl was loud and long; it was repeated again and again. Tom glanced rapidly to the right and left; Dido was not in sight. He leapt across the ditch, and pushed his way through the brambles and short growth into the wood, and towards the spot whence the hound's cries proceeded, now short and feeble.

Beyond the oaks was a belt of pines free from under-growth, and it was here that Tom found his hound stretched upon

the dry fir-spines. His first impression had been that Dido had set her foot in a trap laid for vermin, but a glance showed him that a more serious mischief had befallen her.

"Dido! What is it? poor old girl!" he cried, dropping upon his knees by her side.

At the sound of his voice the poor brute tried to get upon her feet, and fell back with a whine. Tom had a warm affection for dogs, for this one especially. Dido had recognised him on his coming to the Hall, though she had not seen him for eighteen months. He passed his hand rapidly over her body and legs without finding any trace of a wound; a drop of blood-stained saliva in the corner of her mouth was the only proof of injury as she lay. He essayed gently to raise her head; she gave a sharp cry, and then, as he tenderly lowered her head again upon

the ground, she licked his hand in forgiveness of the pain he had caused her.

"Poor loving, faithful bitch!" he murmured.

She wagged her tail feebly in response, and whined as if complaining that she could do no more. He put his hand down to her muzzle; she gave it a lick, opened her glassy eyes to look again upon her master, and then with a deep gasp closed them for ever.

If love and fidelity qualifies a soul for immortality, it was but her unworthy body that ceased to live; but the earthly link which had bound her to Tom was broken, and when lifting her head he discovered the under side all crushed and splintered by a murdering blow, he cried:

"My God! this is too harsh! Why am I robbed of this one poor friend?" And then, as he looked around him in a sudden

access of passion. "Who is the coward that has done this thing?"

As if in reply there came from the thickets behind him the report of a fire-arm, and a shot sung past his ear.

To revenge Dido Tom sprang to his feet and dashed into the thickets, over which the smoke yet hung in blue strata. He plunged forward, tearing his way through the impeding growth until he reached the road. Not a creature was in sight, not a sound reached his ears, for the rascal who succeeded in killing Dido and failed to murder Tom, had slipped into the pine wood, and was escaping rapidly over its free and noiseless carpet.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BLAKE AND TOM'S CONCLUSIONS.

AFTER half-an-hour's fruitless search, Tom gave up the pursuit, and in dull dejection made his way to Talbot Hall. An hour before he had scarcely noticed Dido's caress, now, feeling her loss at every step, he wondered how he could have valued her so slightly.

"It is by loss that we learn to prize the trifles that contribute to our happiness, and not alone the trifles," he said

to himself. He was beginning to profit by the lesson.

He found the steward in the lodge with his daughter.

"Come with me," said Tom; "I want the light cart at once."

A short time afterwards Jenny heard the cart coming down the drive, and opening the gate, looked up with anxiety at Tom, who sat by her father's side; but she could learn nothing from the expression of his face.

"Anything happened unpleasant, Sir?" asked Blake, breaking the silence when they were fairly on the road.

"My hound, Dido, has been killed."

"Killed, Sir?"

Tom nodded; he was in no humour for talking.

"Who killed her, Sir? if I may make so bold as to ask?"

"Slink," Tom answered.

The steward echoed the name, looking at his master incredulously; but Tom had turned his face aside, and Blake saw that it would be unwise to question him further at present.

Tom, by a sign, bade the steward pull up when they came to that part of the road where he had been arrested by Dido's cry, and led the way through the wood to the fir plantation.

"Poor bitch!" he said, looking down upon the lifeless hound who could never again greet him with joyful yelps, or answer to his call; and then as Blake came up he turned away, his eyes filling with tears.

The steward had less feeling for dogs, and proceeded to examine the wound.

"Dear heart o' me! here's been a blow to be sure! She was a good hound too."

Tom walked slowly away to escape the commentary. Presently Blake came

to his side, as he was leaning against the trunk of a fir, and said:

"You'll excuse me, Sir, but did you see Slink kill the hound?"

"No."

"May I make so bold as to ask why you think he did it?"

"I have been chasing him with the hound; a good reason for supposing that he killed her."

"Take my word for it, Sir, 'tisn't none of his work. He couldn't do it."

"Why not? The same hand that took the hound's life tried to take mine."

"And you didn't see him?"

"No; he shot at me from the bush there. What does it matter who did it, the bitch is dead?"

"With all due respect, Sir, it matters a great deal. The man who fired at you is a murderer at heart, and God forbid we should lay a crime, even in our own

minds, against any man without due cause. 'Tis not to be thought on carelessly, and the sin should be proved against the wicked in justice to the innocent."

"You're in the right, Blake. Tell me why you think Slink guiltless."

"He loved that hound, Sir, as much as you did. She slept upon his feet o' nights, and if she followed his scent this afternoon, as my Jenny tells me you took him for to do, 'twas as much love as instinct that made her trace his footsteps. There's a hunch of bread under the dog's side, she must have been eating the gift from his hand when he struck the blow, and do you think anyone with a heart inside him could do such a wicked, cruel thing as that? If you knew the lad, you couldn't think him capable of such a deed, a poor, harmless critter, that couldn't abear to see a pig killed; and as

for using guns, why, dear heart o' me! he would jump up like a crow if he heard one fired half a mile off. My Jenny's told me all what happened after I'd gone to market. He's got into bad hands, but his heart is decent and clean still. He was hid in the kitchen while you were in the parlour, and when you'd gone to fetch the hound he wanted to give himself up, take the thrashing you had promised him, and ask pardon afterwards like a man. But my girl, who can't get over her fondness for the lad, despite his weak head, and who's got a kind of wholesome Kentish pride in her, said she'd never marry a man who'd been thrashed, and so the lad took to his heels. Now, Sir, I put it to you, with all due respect, do you think a lad of that kidney could kill your hound and shoot at you!"

"I shall be heartily glad to find myself mistaken."

"What motive could he have, when he wants to be forgiven and get a-courting of Jenny agin? No, master, 'tain't Slink, with all humbleness be it said."

"Then who can it be? I have no enemy, at least, none who would descend to such an act."

"It's just likely to be nothing else but a poacher, dogs is their nat'ral enemies; his gun might have gone off as he was crawling through the bushes to escape."

"I heard the shot whistle past my ear the moment before the report."

"Then we can settle whether it was a murderer or a poacher. Where did the shot come from?"

"That thicket. I was kneeling by the dog."

"If it was a poacher he used small shot, and we shall find some in the firs," said the steward, crossing to the trees beyond where the dog lay. He examined

two trees without making any discovery, at the third he pointed to the cut bark, and turning his head to Tom, said, with a melancholy shake of his head, "'Tain't no poacher, master, 'tis a slug made that cut."

"And what do you conclude from that?"

"That you've got a wus enemy than poor Slink."

"He won't be content with one trial and failure, then. Let us get back to the Hall, Blake; I'm sick of the business. As for Slink, I am willing to accept your view of him. Can you take the dog without my help?"

"Yes, Master Talbot."

The steward walked towards the dead hound with his eyes on the ground, and in deep perplexity. He was vain of his own perspicacity, and besides that, his master's life and interests were dear to

him. He stooped down and picked up something from the brown spine-covered earth.

"The villain tempted the hound with all manner," said he, turning to Tom, who was walking apart; "here's a bit o' cheese."

Tom stopped, suddenly remembering the man he had seen at the "Sir Jeffrey" feeding Dido with scraps from the bread and cheese before him.

"What is it, Sir? Have you got ever a clue?"

Tom explained to Blake what was in his thoughts.

"If you've no objections, Sir, we will run up to the 'Sir Jeffrey,' the woman will know her own cheese again, and be able to tell us what became of the man."

Tom agreed to the proposal, and when Blake had laid the dog in the cart, they drove to the "Sir Jeffrey Amhurst"

and made inquiries. The hostess proved to Tom that the cheese was identical with that she had served to Barnabas, and said that he had left a few minutes after Tom, apparently in haste, which seemed to her peculiar, inasmuch as he had idled in the tap-room for so long a time beforehand. Another peculiarity had been observed by her, the man had come to the house on foot but with a spur on his heel.

"Thank God! that clears Slink," said the steward.

When they were again in the cart Tom sat in sombre reflection for some time, then he said:

"The odd thing is that Dido lost the lad's scent close to that inn."

"He did! Then that carries us on still furder, Sir. The man with the spur on his heel might have given his horse to Slink. That would break the scent at once. You may depend upon it, Sir, that

he's the scoundrel who got that poor foolish lad under his thumb. And then again, look here, Master Tummas, he might have reckoned that if he succeeded in killing you, the murder would be charged against Toby, when it was found that you had gone in pursuit of him with the hound."

"The inference is logical enough," said Tom, after a few moments of thought. "But what on earth could be his motive? I never saw the man before in my life—to my knowledge."

To this question Blake could only reply by suggestions—and none of them seemed to Tom a satisfactory explanation of the mystery.

"One thing is sartain, the lad Toby is innocent, isn't he, Master Tummus?" asked Blake, glowing with pride over what he considered his own particular achievement.

"Yes. I am convinced of that—thanks to your sagacity."

"Thank you, Sir, for the compliment. One must have his wits about him to manage an estate as I've managed Talbot Hall for fifteen years, and never had a single complaint from the Admiral or Doctor Blandly. Howsmever, that's vanity. Now we know it isn't Slink as shot at you and killed the hound, and we are justified in supposing that it's the man he calls his master. So much we've got at already—it ain't much, but it's summut."

"And there let it end," said Tom, heartily tired of the subject.

"Let it end!" echoed the steward aghast at the prospect of relinquishing an inquiry that had already reflected so much credit upon his intelligence, and which he anticipated would in the end raise him to the rank of a Machiavel in the society of

the village ale-house. "You'll have the constables out, and the beaters sure-ly!"

"They can't restore the life of my poor bitch."

"But the man who killed her is at large —a villain."

"And is likely to be, for all the constables in Kent wouldn't catch him now. The most likely supposition that we can come to is that his only motive in shooting at me was to get my watch and a few guineas. Having failed he would decamp quickly enough, and is now doubtless out of this shire and half over the next."

"Lord love you, Sir, there's a hundred holes and corners where a thief might hide, but Master Fergusson the constable knows 'em every one."

"A good reason for the thieves to avoid such holes and corners."

"With all duty to you, Sir, I can't

think it's right to let such a man get off scot free."

"He wouldn't if I could have caught him. No good can come of pushing the inquiry further. If the man was caught there is no witness to prove he shot at me, the suspicion would rest upon Slink, and I might be called upon to prosecute him when it comes to light that he had taken my horse. We cannot wish that; for if he be the simpleton you describe, he deserves to be pitied rather than punished. I freely forgive him for his love of the hound. Make Jenny's mind easy on that score, but say nothing about what has happened. Tell no one. Let it be a secret between us. I wish to avoid publicity. Now we will end the discussion, the subject to say the least of it is unpleasant, and the best thing we can do is to forget it as soon as possible."

CHAPTER XIX.

A LOVE LETTER.

THE steward obeyed his master and kept the events of the afternoon a secret from his admirers at the ale-house, because it was his duty; but he felt it not less his duty to follow up the clue secretly in order to protect his master from further outrages, however he might neglect his own safety. And so far from being of Tom's opinion that the best thing to be done was to forget what had happened, he made it the central theme of his cogitations.

He was compelled by his own vanity to disagree with the construction Tom had put upon the murderer's motive. "Gents has nothing to do but to get into mischief through jealousy and such like, and why should Master Tummus, being a gent, not do likewise," he reasoned.

Tom's unexpected arrival at the Hall, his gloom and taciturnity strengthened the idea that he was involved in some tragic complications, and after a few days Blake looked upon it as a certain fact that the unknown assailant was a ruffian hired to do him injury. Supposing this to be the case, he concluded that the ruffian would not leave the county, but wait in concealment until he found another opportunity of attempting his purpose.

Without stating his object, he made inquiries in the surrounding hamlets, but the utmost he could learn was that a horseman and his servant had arrived at

the "George" inn, at Ightham, on the morning of the same day on which the attack was made, and left it the same evening, taking the Wrotham Road. He was not discouraged by this result; the more he thought of the matter, the more satisfied he felt that his own conclusions were accurate, and the prospect of an ultimate triumph—of achieving alone that which his master had declared all the constables in Kent would fail to do—was an incentive to fresh endeavours. Every day he extended the radius of his inquiries.

His peregrination took him away from the Hall for a considerable portion of the day. He was not wanted there. The business of the estate was in such admirable working order that it called for no attention. Tom made no inquiries, indeed he seemed to avoid conversation, and to seek solitude. And Jenny was

secretly rejoiced when her father said he was going out and would probably not return until late.

Jenny had an idea that before long she should see Slink again, and the idea arose from no line of subtle reasoning, but from direct womanly intuition. During her father's absence she spent the best part of her time at the little window, or in the road looking to the right and to the left in expectation. One afternoon, as she was standing thus, a piece of twig fell at her feet. She started in astonishment, for not a soul was to be seen up or down the road, then she heard the call of a blackbird, and knew that Toby must be in the wood facing the gates—for he could equal any bird at whistling. After a glance to assure herself that Mr. Talbot was not in sight, she approached the brambles on the opposite side of the road with a careless step and her eyes alert.

"Here, sweetheart—here I be," whispered Slink.

She nodded and seated herself on the bank beside the bramble through which she could see Slink's head and shoulders.

"Mr. Tom's in the park somewhere," whispered Jenny.

"I know it, love, and your father's hunting after me at Otford—but I'm right glad to risk my life for a chance of seeing your sweet face."

Jenny looked towards the bush, and her eyes half closed smiled in harmony with her lips. It was so delightful to have a lover who would risk his life for her, that she could not bring herself to tell him that Mr. Talbot had forgiven him.

"I'm not the coward I was, Jenny." Jenny shook her head in acquiescence. "I do think it's knowing that you love me gives me courage, dear."

"How do you know I love you?" Jenny asked in a whisper, bending her head over her knees.

"'Cause I don't doubt it no longer." Jenny nodded at this conclusive argument. "An' if you said you didn't I'd up and say you wur a ——" Toby paused, even passion would not justify him in using the appropriate word.

"What would you say I was?"

"I wouldn't say nothun, but I'd up and give you a great buss on the lips, so as you shouldn't say it no more."

"And supposing I wouldn't let you kiss me?"

"Then I'd kiss you more than ever."

His audacity seemed not displeasing to Jenny, and remembering what Barnabas had said, he continued:

"Snivelling and sneaking won't win a girl's heart if she's any spirit. A man

must be bold and venturesome, and laugh at her fine airs."

"Where did you learn that?" asked Jenny suspiciously.

"Hum! When a man goes out in the world he must learn."

"You've been courting fine ladies in London, Toby."

"Do you think I've got two hearts, Jenny? And if I had, do you think I could love one of them ladies, all mucked up wi' paint and powder, and dressed up like a Pope, after seeing of you with your fine brown arms, and your red face, and your dress all sweet and pure from the wash-tub? No, Jenny, I never wars such a fool as that'd come to."

Jenny gave a sigh of satisfaction, and smiled encouragement upon her lover, whose words were as good as poetry to her ear, and better perhaps, being intel-

ligible, and coming straight from his honest heart.

"And you, dear," continued he; "you han't took Master Tummus's advice; you han't looked about for no decent lad?"

"No, Toby, I won't have ne'er a sweetheart but you."

He took no notice of the distinction, but oblivious of danger, started up to his feet, came to her side, and throwing his arm around her neck, gave her a hearty kiss.

"Don't, Toby dear, don't. Look, there's master walking in the drive."

"What's the odds? I don't care a button," cried Slink, boldly. "Don't you fear, Jenny—he shan't thrash me, nor no other man now."

"But I shall get into trouble."

Jenny rose from her seat.

"Don't ye go, sweetheart. See I'm safe behind the briars again. Stay awhile,

pretend to be plucking a posy. I've a plenty to say to you yet awhile. I didn't look to see you. I daredn't hope to speak wi' you, so I wrote you a letter—leastways I got a party to write it for me."

"'Tis all the same, and have you put it in the post?"

"No; I feared it would go wrong, so I brought it wi' me to throw to you when I see the chance. But I can tell you all I had put on the paper."

"Give me the letter all the same, dear," murmured Jenny, with an insinuating smile. A letter was a tender form of communication that she had never yet received, and did not wish to lose.

"Pluck at the hair-bell against the bush, sweetheart."

Jenny extended her hand towards the flower, and Slink catching it conveyed it to his lips.

"Quick, quick. I hear a cart coming, 'tis father belike."

"Aye, I know the trot of the old pony. There, take the letter, love, and fare thee well. I shall come for the answer to-night."

He put a packet in her hand, which he held while he bent forward and kissed her arm. Then he withdrew with commendable speed into the wood.

Jenny waited a few moments in anxiety until her sweetheart disappeared before leaving the bank. When she turned she found that Mr. Talbot was not more than a dozen yards from the gate; that compelled her to be cautious. It was before the time of pocket-holes, and to get at her pocket it was necessary to raise the skirt of her dress, which could not be done without risking Mr. Talbot's observation. She slipped her hands under her apron, concealing the letter, and stood with her

head on one side as if trying to catch a glimpse of the approaching cart. As the steward came up to the lodge, Mr. Talbot turned his back on the gate and walked away over the lawn.

"I'm going to the farrier's, my gal," said Blake, as the cart stopped. "Here be the butcher's meat for cook—take it."

Jenny lifted her right hand, keeping the other with the letter under her apron.

"Both hands, gal, or you'll drop it, like as not."

"No, I shan't, father."

"Do as I bid ye, and don't be so lazy."

Jenny grew scarlet to the loose curls on her brow, dropped her head, and still kept her left hand covered.

"What's a matter wi' ye, cut your finger, lass?"

Jenny, driven to desperation, nodded.

"Hei! hei! there's nought to be ashamed of in that, show 'un to me?"

Jenny did not move, except to cover her face with her right hand. Blake tied the reins to the side iron of the cart and descended quickly. Another mystery called for the exercise of his perspicacity. Jenny remained immovable, while her father lifted her apron and took the letter from her hand.

"Highty tighty! what have we got here? A letter like one of the gentlefolks, and spotted from end to side wi' kisses in red wax. 'Jenny Blake' writ in a hand as good as I could write it. My gal, you haven't been making acquaintance with any of these gentlemen rakes, I hope."

"No!" exclaimed Jenny, scornfully. "'Tisn't no gentleman, 'tis only—only—Toby."

"Toby! I knowed it! I knowed it

well! He gave it you wi' his own hand, didn't he?"

Jenny nodded.

"Don't be ashamed, Jenny, I ain't a bit wroth wi' you. If he's the decent lad I believe him to be, I won't come between you no more than a father should. Where's Master Talbot?"

"There, across the lawn."

"Then we'll go inside and read the letter; pony won't budge. Come on, my gal."

Her father's unexpected good-humour restored Jenny's courage, and she followed him into the lodge with alacrity, no less eager than he to know the contents of the packet.

Blake opened the cover and displayed a pink neckerchief and a folded paper.

"Here, Jenny, take the favour; and now let us see what he says.

"'Dearest sweetheart,'" he read.

"'This comes hoping to find you as it leaves me at present, thanks be to God,' (very pretty, to be sure), 'barring I can't sleep of nights for thinking how wretched I am all day parted from you, and living with a master who, speaking respectfully, as in duty bound, is no better than he should be, which often and often I have wished myself dead and in my grave.' (I could have sworn it was so. It's a very good letter." Jenny sobbed and wiped away a tear with her apron). "Wished I was dead.— 'Dear Jenny, I send you a token which you don't need to be ashamed to wear, as I am not to give. It was bought with my own money honestly, mending the pig-sty for Mrs. Smith, the sexton's wife, who is writing this letter for me now.'

"Smith the sexton, I don't know him."

"Isn't it a lovely letter, father?"

"No, my gal, he ought to have put in where he is stopping, and told us more about his master; however, we may come to that presently.

"'Dear Jenny, if you only knew how glad I was to mend the pig-sty and earn money to buy you a token, though I don't know whether you will think it is good enough to wear, although if you love me as I love you, with all my heart, and I ever shall until my dying day. Dear Jenny, I can't tell you all I want to tell you, but if you will only meet me for two minutes, when your father and Mr. Talbot are away, I shall be able to tell you all. Dear Jenny, if you love me true, write me a letter and put it aside of the gate-post at night, and I will fetch it away when master is asleep, but if I am too bad for you to think of, tear up the token and put it in place of the letter. Dear Jenny, I shall love you and think of

you always, and so no more at present from your humble and true sweetheart,

"'T. SLINK.'"

Having finished the letter, Blake sat down and stroked his chin in thoughtful silence, while Jenny, taking her treasures into the adjoining kitchen, shut the door and had a good cry. Before the plenteous fountain of her emotions was exhausted, her father called her.

"Jenny, my gal," said he, when she opened the door and made her presence known by stifled sobs. "When did Master Talbot say he was a-going to Maidstone?"

"To-morrow, father."

"What time?"

"I don't know; he told cook when she was asking about the butcher's meat, that he should dine at Maidstone o' Wednesday."

"Ah! then he's sure to be out of the way betwixt six and nine. Get out my desk and write a letter to Toby just as I tell you."

Jenny opened the desk, and hastily composing herself, sat down with a pen in her hand.

"I'm ready, father," said she.

The steward, who had not ceased to caress his chin, dictated:

"Dear Toby."

"Dear sweetheart!" wrote Jenny, and then waited, smiling at the endearing words.

"The master is going to dine with Mr. Barton at Maidstone," Blake pursued. It was not necessary to state who was to be Tom's host, but the conceited old man never missed an opportunity of displaying his knowledge.

"Yes, father."

"Mr. Barton at Maidstone—have you

wrote that? Right—and my father and me will be quite alone. Do not be afraid of my father, he has found out that you are in the power of a bad man, and if you trust him he will get you free, and he will put you in a good place, and he will make Mr. Talbot forgive all that you have done, and he will permit you to court me if you trust him, and do what he tells you. So come to-morrow evening about six o'clock, and my father will be the best friend to you that ever you had."

Having written this, with frequent breaks for correction and amendments, Jenny was instructed to put her name at the bottom.

"May I write a little word or two for myself?" she asked.

The old man graciously accorded permission, and she wrote:

"Dear sweetheart, come about five

through the wood, and if you see the little window open, you will know that Mr. Talbot has already gone;" and after that a dozen lines of sentiment, which, being written for her sweetheart only, might seem nothing but sheer nonsense to any other reader.

After supper Jenny placed the letter by the gate-post, and from her bed-room window watched patiently until in the dead of night she saw her lover take it from its hiding-place, and pressing it to his lips, vanish in the obscurity.

CHAPTER XX.

BARNABAS PREPARES FOR BUSINESS.

"IF you please, your honour, may I have a few hours this evening?" asked Slink. "I've groomed the hosses, cleaned the stables, and made the bits and stirrups to shine like silver."

Barnabas was in the yard of the roadside inn, near Otford, where they had been staying for the last six days, seated on a step, his legs stretched out, his back resting against the stable wall,

and his hat tilted over his nose. Barnabas puffed at his long clay pipe in silence, while he considered whether policy would justify him in refusing his servant's demand. Slink had lately given him considerable anxiety; a moral as well as physical change had been apparent in the lad since the day he had had his hair cut. There was something more of a man and something less of a fool in his appearance and behaviour. A tap on the pistol-holster no longer awed him; he only blinked when the lock of the pistol was exposed, and Barnabas feared to draw the pistol further for fear Slink, instead of sinking on his knees, should take to his heels. He couldn't afford to lose him, or he might have been tempted to lead him into a quiet part of the road and try the effect of a running shot upon him. He began to fear that sooner or later Slink would bolt, and throw himself upon

the mercy of his late master. That would never do.

As harshness seemed to be losing its effect, he had been unwillingly constrained to adopt kindness as a hold upon him, and although he went no further than giving him beer and a few hours of liberty, the result was undoubtedly good. Slink was more cheerful, more ready to play piquet, more responsive to his wishes. Still Barnabas grudged the concession.

"Want to go out again," he snarled, after a dozen silent whiffs. "Have you got the Saint Vitus's dance, or what's the matter with you that you can't stay still in one place for two minutes together?"

"There's nothing to do, master."

"Nothing to do. There's piquet. I owe you your revenge." This was the only debt that Barnabas ever acknowledged. "Nothing to do is the fault you have to find now, eh? A little while ago

you were snivelling because we were doing too much. What will content ye, I wonder. Here all for your sake I'm out of pocket for your fine clothes, and your hairdressing, and presents for your sweetheart, and I'm living in the country paying all expenses and treating you as an equal—living as innocent as a plaguey parson, and yet you're not grateful."

"Yes, I am, master. I—I—I'm very much obliged to you, and as to the expenses, you can stop 'em out of my wages."

Barnabas grunted at this suggestion, and after a few more whiffs :

"Well, you can take your few hours now," he said.

"Please, your honour, now won't do."

"Why not ?"

"'Cause I want to take 'em this evening."

"Hum ! Where are you going ?"

Slink made no reply.

Barnabas raised himself, tilted his hat off his nose so that he could see Slink's face, and repeated the question in an angry tone.

Slink scratched his ear, and finding no means of evading the confession, answered :

"I'm going to see my sweetheart, an' please your honour."

"I don't mind your seeing her," said Barnabas, his small eyes twinkling. "You will just make inquiries about Mr. Talbot; find out what he does all day; but you mustn't mention my name. Yes, you can go; but mind, don't forget that you have a good, indulgent master, and don't look sour when I bid you do your duty. Don't be ungrateful, for ingratitude I can't abide."

"You'll never find me ungrateful, master."

"And another thing—I'm always think-

ing of your welfare. You keep clear of Mr. Talbot, for if he can string you up on the tree he will. Beware of him."

"Oh, there's no danger, your honour, thanking you kindly for the warning—Master Tummus is going across to Maidstone this afternoon—that's why I'm going a-courting Jenny this evening."

"Why the devil didn't you tell me that at first. Going to Maidstone this afternoon—alone?"

"Don't know, master. One thing's sartain—Master Blake ben't going wi' him."

Barnabas received this information in silence. Pulling his hat over his eyes again, he rested his elbows on his knees, and gave himself up to reflection, biting the waxed end of his pipe.

Slink went off to the stable in high glee, saying to himself that after all his master was a good sort of man at the bottom, and

greatly improved since he had given up hunting for his lost property. How he was to serve Barnabas and listen at the same time to the proposals of Jenny's father was a problem which has just taken hold of his mind, when his master called from the yard, where he was still sitting nibbling his pipe-stem.

"Here I be, your honour."

"Slink, you won't be able to see your sweetheart to-night. I am going out, and I shall want you." Barnabas raised his head, and catching sight of Slink's lugubrious face, continued: "Halloa, what's this? Looking glum at the first thing I tell you to do? Ah, I thought how it would be. This comes from being too indulgent."

"You said I might go and see my Jenny," whimpered Slink.

"Yes, and this is all the gratitude you show."

Slink rubbed one foot over the other, and tried to see what he had to be grateful for.

"I'm thinking of your interest now, though it's a precious thankless task," Barnabas pursued. "You want to go back to your old service, don't you?"

"I don't want to be ungrateful, master."

"Answer me straighforward, yes or no—do you want to go back to the Hall?"

"Yes—I—I ——"

"Ah, I thought so. You can't do anything, think anything, but I can find it out. I've thought of discharging you some time, but I wouldn't let you go without making sure beforehand that you got a good master. Leave you to yourself and you're bound to go wrong. Besides, if I didn't say a good word for you, you'd be caught and strung up in a

brace of shakes. No one would believe your story with that hang-dog face to convict you. Now what I'm going to do is this: to-night, when Mr. Talbot is riding home from Maidstone, I shall trot up to him, tell him the whole truth about the horse, and ask him to forgive you. You can follow a couple of hundred yards behind, and if he agrees to pardon you, I'll give you a call and you may come up and make it all right at once; but if he won't I'll just quietly leave him, and we'll look out for another master. There'll be no harm done in asking him, will there?"

"No master, but will you do all that for me?"

"Yes—though you scarcely deserve it. However, you may show your gratitude afterwards."

"But wouldn't it be better if your honour went up to the Hall to-morrow morning?"

"Oh, you think you have more sense than I have, hey? I would be a pretty fool indeed, to go up to the Hall where there's half a dozen men who at a word from their master, would arrest me for being your accomplice."

Slink hesitated, he had learnt to doubt the Lieutenant's pretexts for making acquaintances on the road. Still rubbing his feet together, he said with anxiety in his voice,

"You don't think that Master Tummus owes you anything, do you your honour?"

"Not a penny-piece. Look here, you can do as I tell you or not, just as you like, but if you refuse this offer I make, do you know what I shall do?"

"No, your honour."

"I'll go straight off and turn King's evidence against you for stealing the horse, that will save my neck if it breaks yours.

I'm determined I won't be your accomplice any longer. I'm sick of you."

"My accomplice?"

"That's it. Don't be a fool, Slink, and make me angry just at the very moment I'm trying to be nice and kind to you. I'm taking the best and safest method of getting out of the difficulty you led me into, and you haven't the gratitude nor the decency to help me. Do you think your sweetheart will have anything to say to you if you are no wiser nor better than that?"

"I'm not ungrateful, master—I only want to do what's right."

"So do I."

"Shall we have to wear anything over our faces, your honour?"

Barnabas took the crape from his pocket and throwing it to Slink, said:

"You can burn it if you like; now are you satisfied that there's nothing to fear?"

This proof seemed to Slink so convincing that he agreed to act according to his master's instructions, and escaped to the stable to hide his shame in having doubted the honesty of the Lieutenant's intentions.

About seven o'clock they left the inn together, and passing Borough Green and Plaxtol, crossed the main road and following the windings of a long lane, came eventually to Bisford, a spot marked by the "Three Barges," an inn standing a dozen yards from the Medway, at the point where the bye-road from Sevenoaks joined the tow-path to Maidstone Bridge. It was by this route Slink assured his master that Mr. Talbot would probably return, the distance to Talbot Hall being far less, and the lanes more agreeable to a horseman than the main road. It was yet early for one to leave a dinner party; after a minute's consideration, Barnabas

led his horse into the yard of the "Three Barges" and dismounted, giving Slink instructions to bait the horses well. From the settle in front of the inn, the tow-path could be seen for a considerable length, and here Barnabas sat until the distance became indistinct. It was nearly nine o'clock when they remounted. Barnabas trotted slowly along the tow-path; Slink followed at a safe distance. Both were on the alert; Slink preparing to fly at a moment's notice, Barnabas taking in the natural advantages of the situation as they passed before his practised eye. There was one space which he stopped to examine minutely. A light vapour hung over the water, reflecting the twilight of the summer night, but the tow-path shadowed by the wide-spreading boughs of a row of elms was in deep gloom. A gate at one time had crossed the path; only the posts stood now, one by the

hedge which lay between the path and the elms, the other upon the steep edge of the river bank. Beyond the hedge rose a corn covered hill; on the opposite side of the river there lay flat meadows. Nothing living was to be seen except the shadowy outline of a cow in the water meadow. The "Three Barges" lay half a mile behind.

Turning in his saddle, Barnabas called to Slink.

"How far to Maidstone Bridge?"

"A mile and a half or thereabouts."

Barnabas turned his horse and walked back to Slink, looking at the hedge.

"Can you get through the hedge anywhere?" he asked.

"There's a gap lower down, your honour."

"Get through and put yourself under cover. There are not many folks come along here this time of night, hey?"

"Not one a week."

"Stay by your horse in the lee of the hedge until you hear me call. If I don't come for three hours, wait. You can think of all the good things that are likely to happen. I am going on to Maidstone, and when you hear me call you, your Mr. Talbot won't owe you any grudge."

"I—I—don't seem to have much courage master—I—I hope it will be all right."

"*If* you obey it will be all right; if you don't you'll hang, or I'm a Dutchman."

Barnabas retraced his steps slowly until he came to the two posts; then he dismounted and tested the strength of the posts. They were firm enough for his purpose. From under the rolled cloth on the bow of his saddle he took a closely bound hank of cord; unwound, it was a six yards' length of three stranded line not thicker than an ordinary pencil, but tough as

wire. One end he tied to the post by the hedge, the other to the post on the bank, forming a barrier about two feet from the ground and invisible in the gloom. Having tested its strength, and satisfied himself that it was reliable, Barnabas remounted, and trotted off towards Maidstone.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE BUSINESS IS DONE.

"SHALL I go by the road or the tow-path?" Tom asked himself as he passed the gate and walked his horse over Maidstone Bridge. The road was hard and uninteresting; the tow-path was turfed; for a full mile; the river was seductive. There is ever a tender sentiment in flowing water, and Tom's heart being open at this moment to the influence of sentiment, he took the tow-path. A man is never more ready to take an amiable

and hopeful view of society and himself than when he has been drinking good claret. Tom had drunk a bottle of excellent claret, and as he trotted beside the grey river he felt happier than he had been for many days.

He was not a spiritual being, with a soul independent in its action to the movement of a liver, but simply a man of firm flesh and untainted blood, with moral attributes more or less subject to the guidance of circumstances.

Having chosen the path chiefly for the opportunity it gave him for indulging in reverie, he closed his eyes to everything but the mental figure of Lady Betty—even to the soft surroundings of grey river and star-lit landscape, which gave tone to his reflections.

Not a sound disturbed his sweet and dreamy thoughts, until leaving the turf his horse's hoofs clattered on a harder path.

The lively ring seemed to awaken more vigorous ideas. Putting his horse to a trot, he said, as if to conclude the subject of his meditation: "Ah, well! if I can but manage to keep away for a few months until my Lady Betty's mind is resolved, all may be well—all must be well. If she has found no one more lovable than me, then 'twill be joy for both of us, and if 'tis my fate to learn that there is another man capable of making her happier than she might have been with me, why then," with a sigh, "so much the better for her, sweet girl."

What was the sound that mingled with the rattle of his horse's hoofs—an echo? He reined in and turned upon the saddle, for the sound, unabating, came from behind. He could see nothing, for a bend in the river interposed a veil of mist, but clearly a horseman was following. Had he forgotten and left behind anything, and was it Barton in the

rear? No; Barton had complained of his horse being dead lame as an excuse for not accompanying him on the road. Was it an honest man or a rascal? The probabilities were so equally balanced as to give no choice. He put his horse to the gallop for a couple of minutes, and then reined in quickly. The horseman behind was galloping, and Tom had no longer any doubt as to his character. What was to be done? To turn his horse and wait for his adversary in a narrow path shaded by trees would be unwise.

"We will have a race for it until we reach the open," said Tom, "and then ——" he opened his holsters.

It was pitch dark beneath the trees, and at a break in the path Tom was within an ace of being pitched into the river. "I won't break my mare's knees for a confounded thief," said he, checking her pace to a trot.

He could hear that his pursuer had not relaxed his speed, and was gaining ground quickly. Nevertheless he kept the mare at a brisk trot, feeling certain that he must be near an opening which he remembered.

"Stop, curse you!" cried Barnabas, now within a dozen yards of Tom.

The cry had the effect he desired; Tom's mare, more frightened than he, broke away with a bound, and the next minute her legs were struck under her by the extended cord, and she fell upon the line, shooting Tom out of the saddle and on to the bank, and the mare and he lay as still as the dead.

Rapidly dismounting, for the mare lay across the path, Barnabas looked for the thrown man, and caught sight of the dark body lying half over the bank, and clearly defined against the grey mist of the water. Standing by the fallen horse,

he cocked his pistol, levelled it at Tom's lifeless body, and fired. At the same instant—perhaps startled by the detonation—the mare struggled to gain her feet, and struck her iron heels against the right shin of Barnabas. He fell with a scream, while she, plunging wildly, went over the bank, and, with a splash, into the water.

"Slink!" roared Barnabas.

"What's the matter, master; what's happened?" cried Slink, running up.

"My leg's broke, that's what's the matter. What's that sound?"

"Voices, master; somebody's coming. Good Lord! what have you done?"

"Voices! Get my other pistol. Quick, or it will be the worse for you. Do you hear?"

"Yes, master; yes. But dear heart! don't you think you've done enough mischief with t'other? You'll break your other leg, maybe."

"Plague take you, my pistol! What's that?"

"I've dropped it, master, and I can't find it, and—oh, my goodness! there's the voices again."

A volley of oaths, and then Barnabas cried, "Bring my horse closer—lift me up. Oh!" More oaths as Slink raised him upon his left leg, and he laid his arms over the saddle. "Now catch hold of my left leg and lift."

Slink obeyed, enabling his master to lie across the saddle, and following his instructions, led the horse along the path to the gap, a couple of hundred yards below, and through it into the cornfield where Slink's horse was patiently browsing under the cover of the hedge.

"Lift me off, and for your own sake handle me carefully. Quick, or I shall swoon."

When he was laid upon the ground,

and had taken a gulp of spirits from a bottle, he said, between his groans and oaths,

"I don't hear any voices now."

"I do," said Slink, trembling. As a matter of fact the voices, if they had existed outside of Slink's apprehensions, were silent now.

"So much the better," said Barnabas. "It will be necessary for you to look sharp if you wish to escape hanging."

"What's to do now, your honour?" asked Slink, trembling in every limb.

"Talbot's been thrown from his horse, and lies there by the water's edge with his neck broke. If he's found there you'll be hanged for it. Go back and shove his body into the river."

"I couldn't your honour, I couldn't," Slink whispered.

"What, afraid of a corpse! Go and do it, or by George I'll call out for

assistance and swear you murdered him?"

"For the love of heaven spare me, master, dear!"

"Go and do it; 'tis to save your own neck. Go, or I will call murder. Are you going? Mur——"

"Don't call, master, I'll do it. He's dead, you say?"

Barnabas raised himself to answer; a scream escaped his lips, which terrified Slink into immediate obedience, and as he departed his master fell back in a swoon with the agony of his fractured limb.

By slight degrees he slowly returned to consciousness. First he saw the boughs over his head, and through them the stars in the still heavens; then he heard the horses cropping the vegetation; then he felt pains in his leg; finally he recollected what had taken place. He

felt cold about the throat, and putting his hand up felt that he was wet. How had that come about? He had not fallen in the water. Where was Slink? Had he left him there to fare for himself, and escaped to save his own neck? No, the horses were there. He called, and a slight rattling noise, which he had noticed without being able to account for it, ceased as Slink answered:

"Here I be, master," and he crawled into sight showing a face that was visible in the gloom by its ghastly pallor. "*You're* not dead, are you master?" he asked, anxiously.

"No," answered Barnabas, in a mild tone—grateful, not to Slink for his fidelity, but to the luck that had not entirely forsaken him. "What's this wet on my neck—it isn't blood, is it?"

"No; only water. Seeing you was

dead I went and fetched a hatfull of water to bring you to life. Thank mercy you're alive, master! Oh, what a night this has been!"

"Put your finger in your mouth if you can't keep your teeth still. Do you think I want the castanets to cheer me up? Well, have you done it?"

"Done what, master?"

"Pitched Talbot's body in the river."

Slink gulped as though his dry throat choked utterance, then:

"Yes, I have," he said, and added fervently, "may God forgive me!"

"Well, go on; tell me how you did it."

"I can't—I can't. Oh, when I rolled him down the bank, and he lay there in the water, with his face all white except for the dark stain, all white and turned towards me from among the rushes ——"

"Great powers! You didn't leave him

like that to bear witness against me? You shoved him in altogether?"

"Don't ask me; for mercy's sake don't ask me!" said Slink, in a terror that made his speech hardly intelligible.

"One word, fool. Did you shove his head in or not?"

"Yes, I did," and then, sinking on his knees, Slink said again, "God forgive me!"

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

London: Printed by A. Schulze, 13, Poland Street. (S. & H.)